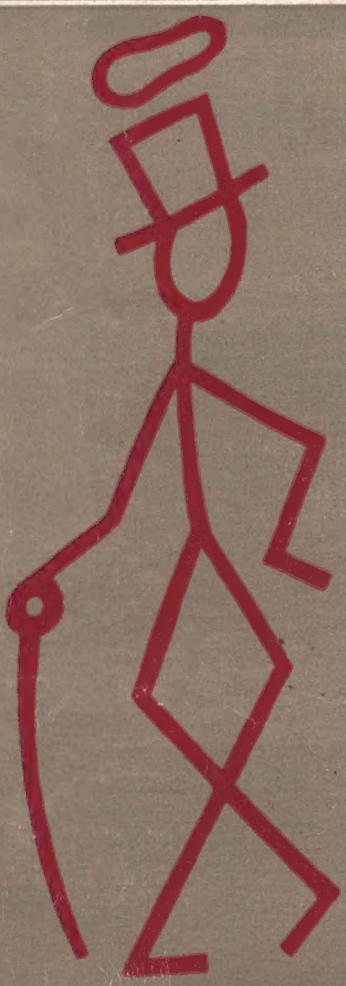
THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JUNE
35c

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



A Case for Lord Peter Wimsey
by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

Murder Is No Accident
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Burglars Must Dine
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Cinderella Wore Black
by STEVE FISHER

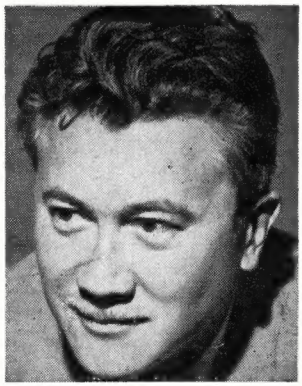
Death of a Honey-Blonde
by ISAAC ASIMOV

THE LOVELORN SHEIK

A New Saint Novelet by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



ONE OF THE DISADVANTAGES of being a monthly magazine instead of a daily newspaper is that we have to go to press about three months, instead of a few hours, before we go on sale; and it is therefore practically impossible to be topical, except about such pre-ordained events as Christmas. However, we can safely predict that not long before you read this a certain doll from Philadelphia and Hollywood will either have become the first genuine reigning royal Princess in American history (I think the achievement could properly claim a place in our history, too) or will have made almost equally spectacular headlines by ditching a throne in the home stretch.

Now, you probably still recall that Grace Kelly met Prince Ranier in the summer of '55 while making a movie on the Riviera called *To Catch a Thief*. And if you saw the picture and were the type of person who bothers to notice who dreams up the situations and dialog through which your favorite film stars are enabled to look so clever and charming, you would have observed that the author of that story was one David Dodge. So, in a remote and mystic way, Mr. Dodge could claim to have pulled one of Destiny's strings in that real-life romance. And by the sheerest coincidence, I swear, we had just bought Mr. Dodge's MURDER IS NO ACCIDENT, for this issue, when the news of the betrothal broke a few days ago (as of when I am writing this). Which is why it's exquisitely exasperating to think how much time must pass before you see it.

And then, the writer who is probably most closely associated with Monte Carlo is E. Phillips Oppenheim. So just for the hell of it, his contribution to this number, BURGLARS MUST DINE (also bought before the Big News) is laid in London. Life is like that.

The business of authors with very different reputations gate-crashing our act goes merrily on. This month it is Isaac Asimov, another of the top names in modern science fiction, who follows the recent footsteps of Theodore Sturgeon and delivers DEATH OF A HONEY-BLONDE. And it's proud we are (that Kelly bit must have left me with an Irish accent) to think that his first crime story was written specially for us.

The talents of Dorothy L. Sayers and Steve Fisher are as dissimilar as the locales of their stories, London and Hollywood. But A CASE FOR LORD PETER WIMSEY and CINDERELLA WORE BLACK are the same Grade A entertainment you're used to getting from them in our pages. Even if they don't mention Monaco.

Well, at least the Saint's new adventure with THE LOVELORN SHEIK is laid in the troubled but oil-rich Middle East, which I fearlessly predict will still be making news when you read it.

Leslie Charteris

These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

Why were these men great?

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor... Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. SD-6, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 400 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.

the lovelorn sheik

by . . . Leslie Charteris

He wasn't a movie version sheik at all. His uncouthness alone could kill a man. And Templar's only weapon was a hazel switch.

THE BOAC MANAGER located Simon in the bar of the Cairo airport, and said: "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Templar, but I still haven't been able to get you confirmed beyond Basra on this flight. So you'll have to get off there, and hope they'll be able to put you right back on the plane. If not, they can definitely put you on the Coronet flight to Karachi on Tuesday. You'd only be stuck there for one night—and two days. You might find 'em interesting. Or of course you could just stay here. I can book you all the way through to Tokyo on this flight next week."

"I'll take a chance on Basra," said the Saint amiably. "I've nothing against this charming place; but I've already been here a week."

"I've been here for six years," said the manager neutrally. "But I'm surprised the Saint couldn't find any excitement in Egypt."

Simon Templar grinned lazily.

"I leave this territory to Sax Rohmer," he murmured. "I liked it better in Cinemascope, anyhow—in a nice air-conditioned theater. Your ruins are wonderful, but the Nile just doesn't

IN AN ARAB PRINCIPALITY ON THE PERSIAN GULF THE SAINT REDECORATES A HAREM WITH ROGUISHLY LIQUID GOLD

send me without Cleopatra. Maybe I'll come back when you start running time machines."

"Well, if I'm still here, I hope I can be a bit more help to you then." The manager fumbled out a carefully folded sheet of paper and a pen. "I know it's a frightful bore, but would you mind very much doing an autograph? I've got a young son who thinks you're the greatest man who ever lived, and I'll never hear the last of it if I let you get away without a souvenir."

"You should have brought him up with more respectable heroes," Simon said, writing his name.

"And that little stick-figure drawing with the halo—your Saint trademark . . . Would you?"

"Sure." Simon drew it. "How do you feel about a drink?"

"Thanks, old chap, but I've still got a spot of work to do." The manager recovered his pen and paper, and put out his hand. "The station officer will be looking out for you at Basra. Have a nice trip, Mr. Templar, and come back and see us."

"Just as soon as you can make me that date with Cleopatra."

Simon sat down again as the manager hurried away. The friendly smile faded from his tanned face as inevitably as the memory of that whole encounter would presently fade. It had been pleasant indeed, but it was still only part of the routine of travel.

And exactly three seconds later, as a direct result of it, nothing could even remotely be called routine.

His hand was grabbed off the table and practically taken away from him by a little man whom he had never seen before in his life, who pumped it and clung to it with the almost hysterical fervor of a parent greeting a long-lost son or a politician looking for a vote.

The little man beamed from ear to ear, and his little brown eyes were bright with terror, and he said in a frantically pleading undertone: "My name's Mortimer Usherdown. Please pretend you're an old friend of mine. Please play along with me. Honestly, it's one of those life-and-death things . . ."

"Well, Mortimer," said the Saint automatically. "Long time no see."

He patted Mr. Usherdown on the shoulder, and gently reclaimed his other hand. The little man with the big name sank into the nearest chair as if his knees had melted. He had a round button-nosed face that made one think of a timid gnome, topped with thinning wisps of mouse-colored hair; he might have been five years on either side of fifty. His trembling could be felt rather than seen, as if he were sitting

on some kind of delicate vibrator.

"Gosh, this is a break, running into you here, Simon," he said, still with that fixed and desperate grin. "If I could have picked anyone out of the whole world to run into now, I'd have asked for you."

He looked up abruptly, and Simon looked up with him, as two other men loomed over them, crowding close to the table with unmistakable intent to be noticed.

"Oh," Mr. Usherdown said, as though he had momentarily forgotten them. "These are two friends of mine—"

The two men did not look like friends of anyone, except possibly some Middle Eastern Ali ben Capone. They were obviously Arabs of some kind and did not care who knew it, since although they wore conventional Western suits of fascinatingly inaccurate fit, with what appeared to be striped pajama tops taking the place of shirts and hanging gaily out below the hem-line of their coats, their heads were still shrouded in the traditional red-patterned cowls bound to their brows by what looked like two quoits of heavy black rope.

But even making allowance for the fact that the typical seamed and aquiline Arab face, especially when bearded, has a cast of intolerant cruelty that only a Touareg mother would have no misgivings about, the two specimens that Mr. Usherdown introduced exuded less natural kindliness than any couple of their race that Simon had seen up to that date.

"This is Tâlib," the little man said, indicating the taller and lankier of the two, whose suit was a couple of sizes too loose. "And Abdullah." The other was shorter and broader, and his clothes were too tight. "This is Mr. Templar, a very old friend of mine," Mr. Usherdown said, completing the introductions.

The two Arabs also sat down.

"I'm glad everyone's so friendly," murmured the Saint. "Who's got the cards? Shall we cut for partners, Mortimer, or do you and I take these two on?"

"Tâlib speaks English," Usherdown warned him quickly.

"How you do?" said the tall lanky one, to prove it.

"Mr. Templar is in the same business that I am," Usherdown explained—or it was apparently intended for an explanation.

"Ah," said Tâlib, with interest. "He is a hot dog, I bet."

He leaned his elbows on the table with a solidity which not only underlined the impression that he was there to stay but added a certain air of possessiveness to his presence which spread out to include the Saint in its orbit.

Simon lighted a cigarette while he tried to make sure of his cue.

Although Mr. Usherdown had most of the conventional earmarks of a Milquetoast type, his current state of suppressed panic reached an almost psychopathic intensity. But Tâlib and Abdullah, for their part, had none of the reassuring air which might have been expected even of the local counterpart of the men in white coats.

They were not actually as conspicuous as their description might sound to anyone who has not seen that cosmopolitan crossroads which shuffles together not merely the costumes and countenances of Europe and Arabia but also Afghans, Indians, Pakistanis, Burmese, Thailanders, Malays, Chinese, Japanese, and every sect and subdivision in between, in what is probably the maddest mixing-bowl of this airborne age; but the aura of self-confident menace about them was as internationally obvious as that of any two dead-pan goons in a gangster movie. Yet it seemed preposterous that they could reduce even such a mild-looking person as Mr. Usherdown to something so close to quivering paralysis in such a crowded and brightly lighted modernism as the Cairo airport here.

Simon glanced calculatingly around the swirling jabbering room, adding up a little knot of transient American GI's, a trio of British officers identifiable even in mufti, and a couple of Egyptian policemen in uniform quietly studying everyone, and found it hard to believe that even such a frightened goblin as Mr. Usherdown wouldn't have dared to call the bluff of two goons who tried to crowd him in such a setting. But it was still a wild possibility that had to be methodically disposed of.

He estimated the extent of Tâlib's idiomatic accomplishments with another blandly analytic glance, and said: "Spill it, Mortimer. Do you want me to clobber these fugitives from a road show of *Beau Geste?*"

"Oh, no," said the little man hastily. "Not on any account, please. Their religion doesn't allow them to drink. But I'll have a brandy, if I may."

He was quite fast on the uptake, at any rate, or perhaps fear had lent wings to his wits as it might have to another man's feet.

Simon stopped a passing waiter and relayed the order, along with another Peter Dawson for himself.

"What on earth are you doing here, Mort, old boy?" he asked, trying to offer another opening.

"I've just been up to Greece. For hazel."

"And how is the dear girl?"

"Who?" Mr. Usherdown looked blank for a moment. "Oh, do you mean my wife? Violet?"

"Of course," said the Saint. "How stupid of me. I knew the

name was something vegetable."

"She's fine. I had to leave her in Qabat."

"That's too bad. Or is it? Does she know about Hazel?"

Light dawned at last on Mr. Usherdown's anxious face.

"Now I get it. You're kidding. I was talking about *hazel twigs.*"

"Hazel Twiggs?" Simon repeated foggily. "I'm sorry, I still can't seem to place her."

"Stop pulling my leg, Simon," pleaded the little man, with a nervous giggle. "You know what I'm talking about. Hazel twigs —for dowsing."

"Nothing like 'em," agreed the Saint accommodatingly. "Although I have heard that these new-fangled fire extinguishers—"

"People have tried a lot of new things," said Mr. Usherdown, with beads of perspiration standing out on his upper lip. "Down in Jamaica I've seen it done with branches of guava. I met a chap in South Africa who did it with a clock spring. And I've read about a fellow in California who uses a piece of bent-up aluminum. But I still say that for sound, consistent divining, there's nothing to beat the old-fashioned hazel twig."

It was Simon Templar's turn to receive a glimmer of illumination as at least a part of the dialogue suddenly lost its resemblance to an excerpt from the Mad Hatter's tea party and became startlingly rational and clear.

"I had to see if I could get a rise out of you, Mort," he apologized. "But you didn't even give me a chance to ask you 'Witch Hazel'?"

Mr. Usherdown cackled again with the giddiness of relief, and nudged Tâlib, whose piercing black eyes had been trying to follow the conversation from face to face like a tennis umpire watching a fast rally.

"Don't let Mr. Templar fool you. He's one of the best dowsers in the business—perhaps even better than I am, and there's no one else I'd say that about. But always making a joke of it; anything for a laugh."

"I get you," Tâlib said. "Very funny man. Very wise in cracks."

He bared his teeth in what was doubtless meant to be an appreciative grin, and succeeded in looking almost as jovial as a half-starved wolf.

The arrival of the drinks, and the business of paying for them, gave the Saint a brief respite in which to digest the exiguous crumb of information which was all that he had to show for several minutes of mild delirium.

Mr. Mortimer Usherdown, he had finally gathered, had a wife named Violet, and was a water diviner by profession, and apparently wanted Simon Templar to pretend to be one too. But

what this could have to do with Mr. Usherdown's life-and-death problem, or the scarcely disguised menace of the two Arabs, was a riddle that Simon preferred to spare himself the vertigo of attempting to guess.

He sipped his Peter Dawson, while Mr. Usherdown took a large and evidently grateful gulp of brandy.

"Seriously now," said the Saint, "what are you up to in these parts?"

"I'm working for the Emir of Qabat."

"Should I know him too?"

"My boss," Tâlib said, bowing his head and touching his forehead. "The Sheik Yusuf Loutfallah ibn Hishâm. *Yusuf* is like in English 'Joseph.' *Loutfallah* means 'Gift of God'—like Abdullah here is 'Servant of God.' *Hishâm—*"

"Never mind," said the Saint. "Let's just call him Joe."

"Qabat is one of those tiny independent principalities the British helped to set up in the Middle East after the first World War," Usherdown said. "Like Kuwait. In fact, it's a whistle stop for some of the local planes from Basra to Kuwait . . . Say!" The little man's eyes dilated with a blaze of exaggeratedly spontaneous inspiration. "I heard that BOAC man saying you might have to stop over in Basra. Why don't you fly over to Qabat with me?"

"I don't know," said the Saint dubiously. "I'm still hoping I'll be able to stay on to Karachi, and make a connection—"

"It's hardly anything of a side trip, by air," Usherdown persisted, in a tone that was not so much persuasive as imploring. "And it's something unique—something you'll never run into anything like again. Besides, you might even be able to help me!"

As if suddenly afraid that he might have gone too far, he turned quickly to Tâlib, who was staring at him with narrowed eyes, and said: "Don't you think the Emir would like that? Honestly, in my racket, Mr. Templar is really the greatest. If we could talk him into working with me, we might get twice as much done in half the time."

The tall one turned and conferred in guttural Arabic with the Servant of God, whose qualifications for the job would not have been revealed by any superficial system of physiognomy; and Mr. Usherdown said to the Saint, in a voice that almost broke with the pressure of its suppressed entreaty: "If you turn me down, you can't be the man I've always thought you were."

"Very good idea," Tâlib said abruptly, while Abdullah nodded. "I think the Emir will make him most welcome. You two working together must be better

than one. Double or quitting, okey-doke?"

The PA system said: "Your attention, please. British Overseas Airways announces the departure of Majestic flight 904 to Karachi, Delhi, Calcutta, Rangoon, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Tokyo, now loading from Gate One."

Names that had woven their iridescent thread through innumerable yarns of high adventure. Simon Templar knew most of them as they really were, in their underlying squalor even more than their romantic overtones, and yet he would never quite be able to strip their syllables of a music that echoed out of a youth in which other names like Damascus and Baghdad had been only the geography of fairy tales instead of their modern sordid reality.

It was positively unfair, he thought, to throw those mysteriously nostalgic sounds at him when he had only been trying to get transported from one place to another with a minimum of inconvenience on the way, and a total stranger with all the appeal of a scared rabbit was trying to sucker him into some fantastic situation which he hadn't yet begun to understand . . .

"Let's talk it over on the plane," he said, and should have known even then that he was hooked.

He took a parting swallow from his glass, while Mr. Usherdown drained the last drop from his, and stood up and led the way out.

Mr. Usherdown followed, practically clinging to his coattails like a small boy trailing his mother through a department-store sale. And in a little while they boarded the plane in the same Siamese-twin proximity, except that in jostling through one of the bureaucratic bottlenecks which still seem to be inseparable from international air travel their positions had somehow become reversed, so that it was the Saint who trailed Mr. Usherdown through the aisle of the Argonaut and was starting to follow him into a pair of seats when the tall Tâlib tried to push past him and take the other one.

The Saint's resistance was as decisive as a gently driven bulldozer, but it left him sitting in the chair next to Usherdown and gazing apologetically up at the Arab who glowered down at him.

"I sit here," Tâlib grated.

"I don't mind sitting here a bit, pal," Simon insisted innocently. "You go on and get one of the *good* seats."

"Plenty of room up front, gents," sang out a cheerful steward, strategically posted to keep the passengers moving through the cabin.

Trapped between uniformed

authority and the stubborn push of other passengers, Tâlib squirmed furiously into the next pair of seats ahead. Abdullah promptly followed him, and in an instant the irresistible flow of following voyagers had sealed them irrevocably in their upholstered slot. They could do nothing but twist around and stare suspiciously over the backs of their seats—until the steward made them buckle their safety belts and even that solace was denied them.

Nevertheless, the Saint waited until the plane was airborne and he could adjust the level of his voice with the certainty that no sudden fluctuation in the background noise would leave it audible to the two men in front, before he said: "Okay, Mortimer, you can talk now. What the hell is all this? Are you in dutch because you haven't been able to find water for Joe's goldfish pond?"

"I wasn't trying to," Mr. Usherdown said, quite seriously. "I haven't even thought about ordinary water divining for years. None of the top-notch dowsers bother with that any more, you know. There isn't enough money in it, and too many amateurs can do it."

"What do wizards like you and I work at, then?"

"Well, I've dowsed for gold in South Africa and opals in Mexico, but mostly I specialize in oil. Had a bit of luck finding some new fields in Oregon and Nevada. Not for myself, of course. I just went over the land where these big companies had leases, and told 'em where to sink their wells. But I got a lot of publicity at the time, and somehow this Sheik got to hear of me, and one day he sent me an offer. It might have made me a millionaire, too. Except that I haven't been able to do a single darn thing for him."

Simon frowned. "You mean it turns out to be an 'or else' deal? If it doesn't make you a Croesus, you think they'll make you a corpse?"

"It's likely to come to that."

"Don't you believe it, Mortimer. You get off with me at Basra, and tell those two Bedouin brigands to go jump on a camel." The Saint smiled sweetly at the two pairs of scowling eyes that kept turning to peer suspiciously over the backs of the seats ahead. "If they get rough, I'll hold 'em while you call a cop."

"It isn't as easy as that," Mr. Usherdown said lugubriously. "I told you, my wife's there in Qabat. Violet. She insisted on going with me—she had some crazy idea that if she didn't I'd be running wild in a harem, or something. So now the Emir's fallen in love with her; and whatever he does about me, he's not going to let *her* leave."

II

IT HAD BEEN an hour past midnight when they took off from Cairo, so that only a few anonymous winking lights in a black carpet served as a parting glimpse of the land of the Pharaohs and their considerably less glamorous successors. It was soon after an orange-colored dawn when they landed on the outskirts of the formless sprawl of habitation that is Basra. And it was dazzling beige high noon, after sundry inevitable delays, as the shuttle DC-3 from Basra slanted down towards the landing strip of Qabat.

Leaning over Mr. Usherdown to get a partial bird's-eye view through the porthole, Simon Templar wondered philosophically if there would ever be a limit to the cock-eyed places he could be dumped into by his constitutional inability to turn down anyone who looked helpless enough in the toils of a sufficiently unstereotyped predicament.

"The whole place only runs to about eight hundred square miles," Usherdown had told him, "and the only town, if you can call it that, would rate about four gas stations back home. But for a few years it produced enough oil to have supplied half of Europe."

"And I never heard of it."

"No reason why you should. It didn't last long enough to get talked about much outside the trade. Then the flow started to dry up; and the big companies moved their main operations down to Kuwait and Bahrain. Don't ask me why. I'm not a geologist. But apparently the experts decided that Qabat was only on the shallow edge of the underground oil pool, or something like that, and they decided to move on and drill somewhere else."

"Which made Joseph rather unhappy."

"You can't blame him too much for that. His royalties have been dwindling away until last year they only came to about sixteen million dollars."

"Thank God for technological progress. The stains from my bleeding heart will rinse right out of this Dacron shirt."

"I know, it sounds as if I was trying to be funny. But you have to remember that in the same length of time, the Emir of Kuwait's income has gone up to over three million dollars *a week.*"

At a figure like that, even Simon Templar was awed.

"If some Texans I've met heard about him, they'd blow their brains out," he remarked. "So I suppose every time Joe thinks about that, it burns him to a crisp."

"He's about convinced himself that it's only because the oil

companies have a personal grudge against him, because he was the first sheik they made one of those fabulous percentage contracts with. He made up his mind he'd prove that their geologists were liars. First he hired some independent experts for himself. But eventually they gave him the same report. That only convinced him that they were afraid to buck the big companies. Then somebody must have told him something they'd read about me, and he thought I might be the answer."

"But you weren't."

"Look, a dowser can't *make* oil—or water, or anything else," said Mr. Usherdown, with a rather forlorn remnant of asperity. "He can only help to find 'em when they're there. I've done my conscientious best, but so far I haven't been able to contradict the regular geologists. All the signals I've picked up were definitely of the declining type."

The town below their wing-tip looked even more hopeless than Mr. Usherdown's description had led Simon to expect. It sprawled in an approximate semicircle of which the diameter followed the blue-gray line of the Persian Gulf, which from that altitude had a leaden air of sultriness that suggested none of the cool relief of more hospitable seas.

The most modern and efficient feature of its topography was the row of cylindrical silver-painted tanks, spaced and aligned along a section of the waterfront with the accuracy of guardsmen on parade, linked by identical patterns of catwalk and pipe, and centered symmetrically around the short straight white finger of a concrete pier projecting a couple of ship's lengths from the shore. The most esthetic thing about it was the large wedding-cake edifice of domes and minarets which lay a little outside the semicircle at the end of a straight black ribbon of road, like a flower on a stalk, with half a dozen s m a l l e r sugar-frosted buildings clustered around it like buds on lesser roads, and even traces of improbably nurtured greenery scattered among them to add vividness to the simile.

In between, in the untidy half-moon of muck from which these exotic blossoms grew, there was only a hodge-podge of vaguely cubist agglomerations of gray-brown mud, cheap wall-board, and rotting canvas, blended together into the uniformity of a mummy's wrappings, alleviated only by the occasional glitter of a patch of corrugated iron. And all around it, to the dust-fogged horizon, stretched the petrified ripples of a dead sea of sand, a faceless segment of the most utterly sterile desert in the world, its awesome emptiness and monotony interrupted only by the

occasional stark skeleton of an oil derrick.

There was no evidence that any large percentage of the liquid wealth that had flowed out of that barren land had been spent on civic projects or the betterment of the Qabatis as a people. In fact, the bird's eye view of Qabat seemed to illustrate the local division of Nature's bounty more graphically than any statistics. But Simon had been prepared for that.

"Yusuf is the real old feudal type of sheik," Mr. Usherdown had explained. "His mind's still in the Middle Ages, even if he has a different colored Cadillac for every day in the week. He owns Qabat body and soul because his father owned it before him and he inherited it like a farm. He wouldn't feel there was any call to split his royalties with his subjects—except his own nearest relatives—any more 'n a Texas rancher would feel obligated to share his oil money with his cows. And the same way, he thinks he's entitled to take anything he wants, because that's something that goes with being an Emir."

"But I thought the Koran was pretty starchy about adultery—that is, about trespassing on any other guy's four legal wives."

"Yes, it is. But all you have to do to divorce your wife is to say 'I divorce thee' three times, in front of witnesses. That's what Yusuf wants me to do to Violet. If I'd only do that for him, he could marry her after three months. But if I'm stubborn, then something could make her a widow, and then he just has to wait four months and ten days."

"Which doesn't give you a lot of cards to open with," Simon admitted. "But you've just been up to Greece, out of his bailiwick—"

"Of course, I made up that excuse about needing some fresh hazel twigs, because mine had dried out in the desert heat. But he isn't so easy to fool. He sent those two along with me—Tâlib and Abdullah. And any time one of 'em went to sleep, the other one stayed awake. I don't suppose either one of 'em, or both of 'em, would bother *you* very much, from some things I've read; but I'm only half your size, and I've never done any fighting. And you've seen 'em for yourself. Wouldn't you say they'd as soon cut a man's throat as talk to him?"

"Maybe sooner. But if you'd started yelling for help in the middle of Athens, in Constitution Square, right under the nose of a policeman, what could they have done about it?"

"I've read about these Mohammedans," the little man said darkly. "They're fanatics. If they die killing an unbeliever, they think they go straight to Heaven.

And on top of that, these two have been brought up to believe it's their holy duty to do anything Yusuf tells 'em. If he'd told 'em to kill me rather than let me start any fuss, they'd be even less likely to care what happened to themselves. I mean, it's all very well to say it's ridiculous and it couldn't happen, but it wouldn't do me much good to be saying it after I was dead and Violet was left for this sheik to do anything he liked with."

Simon had to concede that Mr. Usherdown had a tenable argument. It was, after all, no different from the attitude of any average man who has ever submitted to armed robbery. And in this case there was certainly room for even more than ordinary uncertainty about how reckless the threateners might be.

While the Saint didn't suffer from any of those inhibitions, he realized that the comparatively easy step of stiffening Tâlib and Abdullah would not contribute much towards the rescue of Violet Usherdown. True, Mr. Usherdown would then be free to head for the nearest American consul and appeal for help. He might even, after a time, succeed in convincing the consul that his fantastic tale was true. But then the matter would have to go through Channels. And, in Washington, those Channels would be bound to filter it up to the very highest level.

In a flash of absolute clairvoyance, Simon could visualize the gnawing of well-manicured fingernails that it would cause in the upper echelons of the State Department. For the days were long past, not necessarily for the better, when all the might of the United States stood ready to enforce the lawful rights of any American citizen anywhere.

Simon could hear every word that a composite of all Official Spokesmen would say. "My dear fellow, it isn't like it was when Teddy Roosevelt would send the Navy and the Marines into any banana republic that got too much out of line . . . With the Russians grabbing every opening they can find to throw in a red rag about Colonialism . . . And the United Nations . . . And the trouble we're having trying to keep friends in the Middle East . . . Well, suppose we steamed into the harbor at Qabat and started talking tough to this Sheik—can you imagine the kind of propaganda the Reds could make of it in all the other Arab states?"

And so the Saint found himself landing at Qabat with some vague and fantastic idea of trying to do something about it single-handed. A sardonic quirk widened his mouth and turned the corners fractionally downwards at the same time. Indubitably, he would never learn . . .

The local authority vested in

Tâlib and Abdullah was amply demonstrated by the magical ease with which they marched Mr. Usherdown and the Saint through four separate formality barriers manned by Qabati militia in facsimiles of British battle dress but still capped with the square rope-bound cowls of their forefathers, who had every air of being set for an orgy of red tape at the expense of any unprivileged passengers. If this portentously lubricated transit was somehow uncomfortably reminiscent of the fast clearance which in other countries might be given to prisoners in the custody of police officers, rather than VIP's in the care of protocol expediters, Simon preferred to ignore the resemblance.

They had to wait only a few minutes outside the row of converted Quonset huts which served as airport buildings, until their baggage was hustled through the surging, shouting, screaming, and apparently almost homicidal mob which was in fact merely a typical assortment of Allah-fearing citizens assembled to greet arriving friends and relatives, to bid departing others godspeed, or simply to pass a few idle hours observing the activity. Then Tâlib shepherded them into a salmon-pink Cadillac convertible which rolled majestically away with the uniformed driver playing an astounding symphony on an American police siren, twin klaxons, and a Bermuda carriage bell.

The road from the airfield curved around the outskirts of the town, which at close quarters liberally fulfilled all the promise of tumbledown squalor which it had made to the sky, and dipped briefly into a *souk* where shapeless black-veiled women and biblically gowned merchants brooded and haggled over mounds of dates and bowls of mysterious spices, baskets of dingy-hued rice and chunks of half-withered meat mantled with crawling flies, all of it spread out on the ground to be seasoned with the dust and dung stirred up by the passing populace and their sheep, goats, donkeys, camels, and Cadillacs. Of the last-named there was a concentration, in terms of car per yard of roadway, which could only have been matched in Miami Beach at midwinter.

There was also a fair sampling of only slightly less expensive makes, all equally new, even if sometimes lacking a hood or a fender, and all in the most brilliant colors — together with an assortment of motorcycles overloaded with rear-view mirrors and silver-mounted saddlebags, and even bicycles trying to get into the act with candy-striped paint jobs, tassels, pennants, windmills, and supernumerary bulb horns and reflectors.

"I suppose the biggest cars all

belong to Joe's close relatives, the smaller ones to cousins and in-laws, the motorbikes to the pals they do business with, and the pedal pushers are the lads who just manage to catch some drips from the gravy train," Simon observed, raising his voice with some difficulty above the din with which every other vehicle on the road was enthusiastically answering the diverse fanfares activated by their own driver.

"Something like that," Mr. Usherdown yelled back.

"Only Emir can buy cars," shouted Tâlib. "He give them to big shoots." He turned to scream a sirocco of parenthetic invective at some hapless nomad whose recalcitrant burro had forced their chauffeur to apply the brakes for a moment, and turned back without a perceptible pause for breath. "He give me a car now, maybe. Me big shoot!"

"It sounds rather like that," said the Saint discreetly.

Almost at once they turned off the seething aromatic street which presumably meandered to the heart of the town, and speeded up again through the bare desert on what Simon recognized as the straight stem of highway that he had seen from the air, leading towards the flower-arrangement of palaces.

On contact, it proved to be a badly rutted and pot-holed road which taxed all the Cadillac's resources of spring and shock-absorber even at the death-defying velocity of about forty miles an hour at which their Jehu launched them over it, still tootling all his noise-making devices in spite of having no other traffic to compete with. In about a mile they reached the first touches of imported verdure —at first clumps of cactus, then a few hardy shrubs, then a variety of palm trees at increasingly frequent intervals, finally a hedge of geraniums with a miraculous sprinkling of pink blossoms.

"This is the nearest thing to an oasis in the whole of Qabat," Mr. Usherdown explained. "There's actually a small natural spring, obviously where the first Emir staked out his private estate. It doesn't flow many gallons an hour, though. And after Yusuf's relatives built their own palaces, with American bathrooms and everything, there wasn't much to spare. When he took up gardening, there was even less. The town gets whatever's left over. I don't think anyone ever dies of thirst, but that's about as far as it goes."

"I should think Joe would have wanted you to do some plain old-fashioned water divining before he sent you dowsing for oil," said the Saint.

"What for? Right next door, in Kuwait, they had to spend fifteen million dollars on a seawater distilling plant, and now

they're going to put forty-five million more into a pipeline to bring water from the Tigris and Euphrates—more than two hundred miles. Yusuf's got about all the water *he* needs, personally. All he's interested in is getting something more like the Emir of Kuwait's money."

Seen at somewhat closer range from the royal boulevard, the minor mansions of the Sheik's favorites looked considerably less than palatial, and in fact would not have sparked any fast bidding if they had been on sale in Southern California. The Sheik's own palace, however, although falling well short of Cinemascope dimensions, would have comfortably met the standards of a producer of second features.

The one feature of it which would not have been likely to occur to a Hollywood set designer was the wire-fenced area opposite the main entrance, about a hundred feet long and half as wide, shaded from the merciless sun by strips of cloth stretched between poles spaced around it, bordered by colorful beds of petunias and verbena, and displaying as its proud and principal treasure a perfectly flat and velvet-smooth lawn of incredible green grass.

"Every morning, after prayers, Sheik Joseph walk there without shoes," Tâlib said almost reverently, as they got out of the car.

This time the Saint's smile was a little thin.

Two uniformed sentries at the entrance came to sluggish attention as Tâlib led his charges through a small rat-hole door cut in one of the main doors, either one of which was big enough for a double-decker bus to have driven through, and which Simon surmised were only thrown open in their full grandeur for the passage of the Emir himself.

Even the Saint had to admit that it was rather like stepping over an enchanted threshold into a very passable likeness of an averagely romantic man's idea of the Arabian Nights. The spacious patio in which he found himself had a vaulted roof intricately patterned with pastel paints and gold, but cunningly placed embrasures admitted sufficient daylight while filtering out all the eye-aching glare of the desert. A tile floor in exquisite mosaic lay at his feet, and in the center of it a fountain created three-dimensional traceries of tinkling silver.

Silken hangings softened the walls, and archways with their peaks cut in the traditional onion shapes of Islam offered glimpses of enticing passages and courtyards. But even before those details the thing that struck him first was the coolness, whether

from air conditioning or nothing more than the massive protection of the structure itself, which was in such contrast to the searing heat outside that it supplied in its own tangible surcease the most fairy tale unreality of all.

The Saint forced his mind to turn back from there, over the carpet of tenderly shaded and watered grass outside, across a scorching mile of barren sand, back to the sweltering teeming fetid cluster of desiccated hovels that was the rest of Qabat; and to anyone who knew him well enough his buccaneer's face would have seemed dangerously thoughtful.

No longer seeming to feel called upon to play the tour conductor, Tâlib hustled them unceremoniously along a labyrinth of corridors and cloisters through which Mr. Usherdown was almost immediately the one to take the lead, toddling almost a yard ahead of the Saint with his short legs pumping two strokes to Simon's one. After a full five-minute hike they came to a doorway guarded by a gigantic Negro, naked to the waist and actually armed with a huge and genuine scimitar, exactly like a story-book illustration. Mr. Usherdown, however, seemed to accept this extravagantly fictitious sight as a now familiar piece of interior decorating, and stopped expectantly by the door in a way that was comically reminiscent of a puppy waiting to be let out.

"I only hope Violet is still all right," he muttered.

Tâlib growled a command at the Negro, who stepped aside from the rather theatrical pose he had taken before the door. Then the tall Arab addressed the Saint.

"I send you luggage right away. You rest, wash up. I tell Emir about you." He turned to include Mr. Usherdown. "Sheik Joseph send for you soon, I bet —*Inshallah!*"

"These are our quarters," Mr. Usherdown explained to Simon. "Come on."

He opened the door impatiently, and went in. Simon followed him. The door boomed shut on the Saint's heels, with an ominous solidity which suggested a prison rather than a guest suite; but Simon barely gave it the backward flick of a raised eyebrow. The scarcely half-subtle prison theme had been established long before that.

Simon had already accepted, quite phlegmatically by now, a snapshot impression of a sort of living-room which fitted well enough into the rest of the slightly stage-harem scenery (but after all, he was starting to think, some initial scene-painter must have had *some* authentic motifs to work from) and the curiosity that fascinated him above any

other at this point was aimed whole-heartedly at the *femme fatale* who had been content once upon a time to settle for a quaint little husband like Mortimer Usherdown, and yet whose charms were still capable or raising the blood of an untamed desert chieftain to apparently explosive temperatures.

"Violet, my dear," said the little man, disengaging himself from her bosom, against which he had plastered himself in connubial greeting, "I want you to meet my friend, Mr. Simon Templar."

"Charmed, I'm sure," said Mrs. Usherdown, in the most gracious accents of the Bronx.

She had red hair and green eyes and the facial structure of a living doll; and in her very first twenties, Simon could see, she would probably have cued any typical bunch of sailors on shore leave to split the welkin with wolf whistles. She would have been a cute trick in a night club chorus line—or even in a carnival tent show, where her path and Mr. Usherdown's could plausibly have crossed.

Now, some ten years later, she was still pretty, but about thirty pounds overweight. But this excess padding by Western standards, to the Eastern eye might well seem only a divine amplitude of upholstery; and her coloring would have seemed so startlingly exotic in those lands that it was no longer an effort of imagination to see an unsophisticated sheik being smitten with her as the rarest jewel he could covet for his seraglio . . . Suddenly the one element in the set-up which Simon had found the most mystifying became almost ludicrously obvious and straightforward.

"Mortimer has told me all about your problem," he said conversationally. "I see that for the present you're almost uncomfortably well looked after. Is that Ethiopian at the door a real eunuch?"

"I don't know, I never asked him," Mrs. Usherdown answered with dignity. "I think a man's religion is his own business."

"But Yusuf hasn't bothered you?" persisted her anxious consort.

"Of course not. He's very correct, according to his religion. You should know that. Did you remember to get me that candy?"

"Yes, dear. It's in my bags, as soon as they bring them up. I just hope it hasn't all melted . . . But I s u p p o s e you've *seen* Yusuf?"

"Naturally. He's had me in for coffee, and shown me his electric trains, and I've seen all his old Western movies three times. But he took me out for a picnic in the desert in the full moon, and we had silk tents with carpets, and camels, and everything, and that was very roman-

tic. He's going to buy a yacht, too, and I'm going to help him decorate it, and then we'll take it to Monte Carlo and the Riviera and everywhere."

Mr. Usherdown swallowed his tonsils. "Violet, my love, I mean —he hasn't given up this crazy idea about you, has he?"

"I do not think it is so gentlemanly of you to call it crazy," said his helpmate, with a modicum of umbrage. "And I don't think that is quite the way to speak of a genuine prince who has paid you more fees than you ever got before, and all he wants is not to be made a sucker out of. I am starting to wonder if you aren't only jealous because he is taller than you and looks so dashing; and after all he only wants his own way, which is what they call the Royal Purgative."

The Saint cleared his throat. "I'm here to try and find you a way out," he said. "I don't want to make any rash promises, but I come up with a good idea sometimes."

"You know who Mr. Templar is, dear?" Mr. Usherdown put in.

"He'd better stay out of this if he isn't a better diviner than you," said his wife, with a toss of her coppery curls. "Or he might end up the way you will, if you don't divorce me. Yusuf says he has thought of something that'll let him make me a widow quite legally, and I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't just selfishness if you want me to suffer like that."

III

EXCEPT FOR his costume, the Sheik Yusuf Loutfallah ibn Hishâm, Emir of Qabat, would not have been instantly recognized as the prototype of the desert eagle and untamed lover immortalized in fiction by an English maiden lady earlier in this century, and brought to life on the silent screen, to the palpitating ecstasy of a bygone generation by an Italian named Gugliemi, better known to his worshippers as Rudolph Valentino.

Although his nose was basically aquiline, it was also a trifle bulbous. His teeth were prominent, yellow, and uneven; and his untidy beard failed to completely disguise the contour of a receding chin. As a symbol of his rank, his head veil was bound with twin cords of gold running through four black pompoms squarely spaced around his cranium, instead of the common coils of dark rope; and as an index of his wealth and sophistication he wore no less than three watches on his left wrist —a gold Omega Seamaster, a lady's jeweled Gruen, and a Mickey Mouse.

He ate rice and chunks of skewered and roasted mutton

with his fingers, getting hearty smears of grease on his face. Seated on another cushion at the same low table, Simon Templar tried to be neater, but acknowledged that it was difficult. On the opposite side of the Emir, Mr. Usherdown juggled crumbs to his mouth even more uncomfortably and with less appetite, seeming irreparably cowed by the sinister presence of Tâlib on his other side. The Saint was similarly boxed in by Abdullah, who kept firm hold of a pointed knife, with which he picked his teeth intermittently while staring pensively at the area under Simon's chin.

In a corner of the room, four musicians made weird skirlings, twangings, and hootings on an assortment of outlandish instruments, to the accompaniment of which three beige-skinned young women moved in front of the long table, rotating their pelvic regions and undulating their abdomens with phenomenal sinuosity. It was still quite unreally like a sequence from a movie, except that no censors would ever have passed the costumes of the dancers.

When Mr. Usherdown looked at them, he did it furtively, as if he was afraid that at any moment his wife might loom up behind him and seize him by the ear. But Mrs. Usherdown was not present, having been expressly excluded from the command invitation to dinner which Tâlib had brought.

"Not custom here to have wifes at mens dinner," Tâlib had explained cheerfully; but Simon, remembering the moonlight picnic which Mrs. Usherdown had mentioned, figured that the local customs could always be adapted to the Emir's convenience.

The Saint had hoped to achieve a more personal acquaintance with that lovelorn sheik, and he was disappointed to learn that his host spoke nothing but Arabic, which was not included in Simon's useful repertoire of languages. He had to be content with an impression of personality, which added nothing very favorable to the character estimate which he had formed in advance.

He no longer wondered whether the Emir's infatuation with Violet Usherdown's voluptuous physique might not have blinded him to her shortcomings as an Intellect: obviously Yusuf could never even have been thinking of spending long evenings in enthralling converse with a cerebral affinity, and Simon doubted whether the Emir would have had much to contribute to such a session even in Arabic. But in a ruthlessly practical way he was probably a shrewd man, and certainly a wilful and uninhibited one. For perhaps the first time Simon realized to the full that his dis-

pleasure might be very violent and unfunny indeed.

It was characteristic of the Saint that the crystalizing of that awareness made him, if possible, only a little more recklessly irreverent. As the dancing girls stepped up their performance to coax even more fabulous rotations from their navels, and Mr. Usherdown's attention seemed to become even more guiltily surreptitious, Simon leaned forward to call encouragement down the table to the little man.

"Joe may think he's the Gift of God to women, Mortimer, but you can't say he's selfish with his samples."

"Sheik Joseph got three wifes," Tâlib put in proudly. "Also one hundred eighty concubines. Very big shoot."

The Sheik suddenly threw down the bone on which he had been gnawing, wiped his mouth and whiskers on the back of his hand, wiped that on the lace tablecloth, and uttered a peremptory command. The musicians let their tortured instruments straggle off into silence. The belly dancers slackened off their gyrations and stood waiting docilely.

The Emir burped, regally and resonantly.

Tâlib and Abdullah eructated with sycophantic enthusiasm in response, vying with each other in the rich reverberation of their efforts. The Emir looked inquiringly at Simon, who finally remembered something he had once heard about the polite observances of that part of the world, and managed to express his appreciation of the meal with a fairly courteous rumble. Everyone then turned to Mr. Usherdown, who somehow contrived a small strangled kind of beep which evoked only a certain pitying contempt.

Yusuf gave an order to Tâlib, and the big Arab fumbled in his robes and brought out a thick bundle of American currency tied with a piece of string. He slapped it on the table in front of Mr. Usherdown.

"This pay for your work," he said, "all time since you come here to find oil. Okey dokey?"

"Why, thank you," said the little man nervously.

"Sheik say, you take it."

Mr. Usherdown picked up the bundle uncertainly and stuffed it into his pocket.

Yusuf made a short speech to Mr. Usherdown, accompanied by a number of gestures towards the three supple wenches standing in front of the table, while the little man strained to appear respectfully attentive.

"Sheik say, you choose which girl you like," Tâlib said.

"Why, they're all very nice," Mr. Usherdown said, in some embarrassment.

"Okay, Sheik say you take all three," Tâlib reported, after relaying the evasion.

Mr. Usherdown's eyes bugged. "Who, me? Thank you very much, but I can't do that!"

"Here in Qabat, Muslim law allow you four wives. Or if you no want to get marry, you keep for concubine, like Sheik. You be little shoot."

"I can't take *any* of them," Mr. Usherdown protested, with his face getting red. "It isn't *our* custom. Please explain to the Emir—and the young ladies—I don't mean any offense, but my wife wouldn't like it at all."

"You lose wife," Tâlib said. "Divorce wife, very quick. Give her the boom's rush. Then you keep dancing girl. Whoopee!"

The flush died out of Mr. Usherdown's complexion, leaving it rather pale. But perhaps emboldened by the Saints' presence, he said quite firmly: "Tell the Emir I wish he'd stop this nonsense. I'm not going to divorce my wife, and that's final."

Tâlib conveyed the message. Yusuf did not seem particularly annoyed, or even interested. He grunted a few words in reply which sounded as if they were little more than a cue.

"Sheik Joseph say you have money what you steal," Tâlib translated, as if from a prepared speech. "You take money to find oil. But you not find oil. So you have stealed money. You goddam crook. Now Sheik must give you the works according to the law of Muhammad. It say in the Qur'ân, in the Surah *Al Mâ'idah*: 'From a thief, man or woman, cut off the hands. It is right for what they done, a good punish from Allah' — *Bismillâhi'r Rahmâni'r Rahîm!*"

Mr. Usherdown's face was chalk-white at the end. He clawed the thick wad of greenbacks out of his pocket and dropped them on the table as though they had been red hot.

"Tell him he can keep his money. I only promised to do my best, and I've done it. But if he feels I haven't earned it, we'll call it quits."

Tâlib did not touch the money.

"That all finish—you have taked already," he said with a fiendishly happy grin. "Thief cannot change to not-thief just because he give back what he steal. If he can, any thief get caught, he give back stealings, everything uncle-dory, nobody can be punish. But Sheik say because he love you wife so much, you divorce her, you go free. Not get punish. But if you not divorce her—"

He made a sadistically graphic gesture with the edge of his hand against his own opposite wrist.

"What difference would that make?" demanded the Saint harshly. "His wife still wouldn't be divorced."

"No need, maybe," Tâlib said. "After hands cut off, without doctor, man often die."

The Emir had been following all this with his eyes, as if he had a complete enough anticipation of the scene not to need to have it interpreted line by line. Now, as if he sensed that a psychological moment had arrived, he clapped his hands and called out something that seemed to include a name; and through the velvet drapes on the far side of the room stepped a bare-chested Negro who might have been a cousin of the one who guarded Usherdown's apartment, and who carried the same kind of gleaming scimitar.

The man made an obeisance and glared around hopefully, lifting his blade; and the three dancers huddled together, their eyes round with horror. Beside Mr. Usherdown, Tâlib stood up.

The little man leaned forward and looked at the Saint piteously.

"What am I going to do?" he croaked. *"He means it!"*

"You know, I almost think you're right," said the Saint, fascinated.

Actually, he no longer had any doubt at all. It was all very well to call it fantastic, but he knew that the primitive Islamic law had been correctly cited, and that there were still backwaters in the world where a primitive and autocratic ruler could enforce it to the letter. It would not be much use protesting through diplomatic channels after the deed was done. If, in fact, there were ever a chance to protest at all. Simon Templar could vanish from the face of the earth in Qabat as easily as a far less newsworthy Mortimer Usherdown.

The Saint knew that the error of under-estimation which he had committed was of suicidal dimensions. Now he reviewed the situation in a single flash, adding up the Emir and Tâlib and Abdullah, the four musicians, the ebony giant with the scimitar and an unknown number of other palace guards of his ilk, and an equally indeterminate but certainly larger number of the less picturesque but better armed and probably more efficient militia outside—and came up with a very cold-blooded assessment. He had blithely accepted some extravagant odds in his time, but he hadn't lived as long as that by kidding himself that he was Superman.

But he did attain a modest pinnacle of heroic effrontery as he turned and tapped Yusuf on the shoulder with a genial nonchalance that made Mr. Usherdown's trembling jaw sag.

"Just a minute, Joe," he said. "You may be an old goat, but that doesn't mean you can jump all over the rules if you want everyone else to be stuck with 'em."

The Sheik stared at him with incomprehension mixed with indignation and incredulity, and

then turned to Tâlib for enlightenment.

"Tell him," said the Saint, "that Mortimer isn't a thief yet, because at his own expense he's brought me here to finish the job. Joe will be satisfied if I make him rich, won't he? And until I've had a chance to show what I can do, nobody can prove that Mortimer hasn't delivered."

Tâlib repeated the argument haltingly, but must have succeeded in conveying the general trend of it; for Yusuf listened with a deepening scowl that was not without sharp calculation, and promptly came back with a question.

"Sheik ask, when you do this?"

"Hell, I only just got here," said the Saint. "Give me a chance. I'll go to work tomorrow morning, if you like."

Yusuf stared at him for what seemed like an interminable time, from under lowered beetling brows. Simon could almost hear the wheels going round behind the beady and slightly bloodshot eyes, like the cogs of a laborious sort of cash register. He was betting that the Sheik's tender passion was not quite so intoxicating that it would have obliterated the much longer established urgings of avarice. Besides, Yusuf should figure that he might have his cupcake and his oil too, if he delayed just a little longer. And delay was what the Saint needed first and most desperately.

The Emir growled another question, through Tâlib: "You take money?"

"I love it," said the Saint.

Yusuf spoke to the huge Negro, and pointed to the packet of currency in front of Mr. Usherdown. The guard stepped forward, flourished his scimitar, and dexterously picked up the bundle with the flat of the blade, like a flapjack, and held it out towards Simon.

"Oh, no," wailed Mr. Usherdown. "Then you'll be in the same mess as me. I can't let you—"

"But I'm one of the best dowsers in the business," said the Saint. "Maybe *the* best. You gave me the testimonial yourself."

He took the parcel of money from the sword.

"Now if you not do nothing, you a big thief too," Tâlib said unnecessarily. "Can have hands cut off like him. Okey dokey?"

Simon had slipped the string off the wad of greenbacks and was riffling through them for a rough estimate of their total.

"This is all right for a retainer," he said coolly. "But you can tell Joe that if I strike it rich for him he's going to owe us a lot more than this."

"You find plenty oil," Tâlib brought back the answer, "Sheik say, he be very generous. You

betcha. But you get on the ball damn quick, skiddoo."

"Fine," said the Saint. He put the money in his pocket, lighted a cigarette, and indicated the neglected trio of diaphanously veiled beauties with a gesture of magnificent insouciance. "And now can we go on with the floor show? And may I pick a girl too?"

IV

"I STILL wish you'd kept out of it," Mr. Usherdown repeated miserably, for perhaps the eleventh time. "You shouldn't have let them trick you into touching that money."

"I wasn't tricked," said the Saint scornfully. "I just decided that if I was going in at all, I might as well go in with a splash. Didn't you ever play poker? If you were bluffing, in a no-limit game, would you expect to impress anybody with a two-bit raise?"

This was very much later, when they were back in the guest suite, on which the guards had been doubled—which Simon had been tempted to call a two-edged compliment.

"I'll never forgive myself," moaned the little man.

"Phooey," snarled the Saint. "You invited me in, didn't you?"

"I just happened to hear your name, and I realized who you were. I never thought I'd have had the nerve to pretend to know you like that, right in front of Tâlib and Abdullah. But I was frantic. I thought you might be able to do something."

"Well, I'm trying."

"I mean, something sensational, like I've heard about you—like fighting our way out of here."

"Too much of this is like a B picture already, Mortimer. Don't make it any worse. What did you think I was going to use for armaments?"

"I thought someone like you . . . you know . . . would have a gun."

"I did. It's in the suitcase I left in bond in Basra. Did you think I'd try to sneak it into a place like this, when I'm supposed to be a peaceful water-diviner? You should know how hysterical it makes little big shoots to think of anybody but their own trigger men having nasty toys that go bang. Do you think my overnight bag wasn't searched before they brought it up here, and Tâlib didn't paw me over himself while he was hustling us through the Customs?"

"Perhaps we should have jumped on them at dinner," Mr. Usherdown said weakly. "We didn't talk it over enough beforehand. I could have distracted their attention while you got the sword away from that eunuch, if that's what he was, and then

you'd have grabbed Yusuf and taken him for a hostage, and we might have fought our way out . . ."

Simon gazed at him in genuinely sympathetic amazement.

"My God, my public," he said dazedly. "You must have really seen it like that, with me whacking our way through the infidels like Errol Flynn in his prime . . . Forgive me, Mortimer; but there was a moment when I dallied with an idea of that kind myself, only I sobered up in the nick of time. I suppose I might have wrought some havoc among the Saracens—with your help, of course—but I'd still have had to get all of us all the way out of this castle. Including Violet. And after that, where would we go?

"Take a running dive into the Persian Gulf and start swimming through the sharks? Leap on to three conveniently parked camels and gallop off into the dunes? Or just hitch a ride to the airport and talk our way past the local Gestapo on to the next plane out? . . . Assume that we've busted loose, and we're running: how do you see us getting *out of Qabat?*"

"I deserve anything that happens to me," Mr. Usherdown said wretchedly. "I think you should forget about us and try to escape on your own. I know we'd be a terrible burden, but perhaps you could make it by yourself."

The Saint stood by a window and examined the ornamental iron grille across it with professional appraisal.

"Crashing out of this gilded cage is liable to be more than an overnight project, even for me," he said.

Violet Usherdown helped herself to another chocolate cream from the box beside her.

"That's the first sensible thing I've heard from you for a long time, Mortimer. Mr. Templar should not feel obligated," she said, with remarkable cheerfulness. "Anyway, you know now that you aren't in half as much trouble as you were afraid of."

Mr. Usherdown's eyes took on a slight glaze.

"Nothing worse than having my hands chopped off," he chattered bravely. "Lots of soldiers have had that happen. And you can get wonderful artificial limbs now. I've seen pictures of them. I wouldn't be surprised if I could even go on divining, with a bit of practise—"

"In a pig's eye," said Mrs. Usherdown trenchantly. "You wouldn't be doing me any favors, wanting me to live with a man with nothing but a pair of hooks.

I couldn't stand it." She shuddered delicately. "I mean, knowing it was on account of me, of course, even though he was most heroic. I would rather be divorced and taken into the Sheik's harem."

"But I love you, Vi," pleaded her spouse. "I couldn't sacrifice you like that."

"What is a woman's life but sacrifice?" she asked. "And it isn't as if I would have to put up with his old wives, because he has promised me he will give them away. And even if he is getting down to his last few millions we wouldn't starve to death. When I think of some of the things I've had to put up with since I married you, Mortimer Usherdown, I cannot say it is the worst fate that could possibly happen to me, although naturally it is always a shock to a lady to be put asunder."

Both Mr. Usherdown and the Saint looked at her in oddly similar ways for a moment.

Then Simon touched the little man's arm.

"I want some sleep before the performance tomorrow, chum," he said. "But before I turn in, you'd better dig out those hazel twigs and show me how to make like a real dowser."

It was quite a large and colorful gallery that turned out in the still bearable warmth of the early morning to watch the Saint set forth on his quest, as if it had been the tee-off of a golf championship. There was a group of about three dozen VIP's, identifiable by their fine robes and arrogant bearing, whom Simon took for the squires of the smaller manors and their personal friends. There were, inevitably, Tâlib and Abdullah, with no less than four of the scimitar-bearing Negroes hovering close behind them to add muscle to their menace.

At a respectful distance stood a sizeable crowd of somber and ragged citizens from the town, summoned by whatever served as a grapevine in that grapeless land. A full platoon of the militarily uniformed guards was deployed to keep the common herd at bay—and was also a sobering reminder of the unromantic improbability of the dashing kind of getaway that Mr. Usherdown had dreamed of. From the palace entrance had spilled a heterogeneous collection of servants and minor functionaries, including the quartet of musicians; but the dancing girls were not with them, or in fact any other feminine members of the Emir's household.

However, glancing up at the facade, Simon was sure that he could detect a stirring of veils behind every barred window. He might have imagined it, but he even thought that in one of the gratings he saw a timid flutter of pale fingers, instantly withdrawn . . .

The only woman in plain sight was Violet Usherdown; and the descriptive phrase was not strictly apt, at that, for she had tied a square of brocade over her head in a sort of babushka effect,

and fastened what looked like a man's white handkerchief across the aperture in front in such a way that it masked her completely from the eyes down.

"I've got to obey the custom of the country if Yusuf is going to respect me at all," she had explained with dignity. "Why, I've found out that the women here would rather expose *any* part of themselves than let a man see their face. That means, if I didn't wear a veil, all the men would be staring at me—and I know what men are like, Mortimer—as if I was stark naked! When I think how I used to let anyone here see me with a bare face, before I knew what it meant to them, I'm so embarrassed I could blush all over."

The Sheik Yusuf Loutfallah ibn Hishâm, in conformity with his royal prerogative, was the last to appear; but his arrival was a welcome signal that the period of suspenseful waiting was over. The Sheik confirmed this himself, barking a few words directly at the Saint which needed no interpreter to announce that they meant "Okay, let's get going."

"You want camel or jeep?" Tâlib amplified, with a lavish wave of his arm which embraced both forms of transportation, conveniently parked along the driveway.

Simon had already considered the possibility of stretching the reprieve to the limit by embarking on a safari to the remotest corner of Qabat; but after reckoning that that could hardly be more than forty or fifty miles, he had decided that the time he could gain would not be worth the discomfort involved.

"I shall begin *here*," he said, pointing dramatically to the ground at his feet, "where nobody before me has thought of beginning."

From the buzz of comment that came from those within earshot of Tâlib's translation of that announcement, the Saint knew that he had at least scored a point of showmanship.

He raised the hazel branch which he carried and took hold of it very carefully in the way that Mr. Usherdown had taught him. It was cut and trimmed in the shape of a Y with long arms, and he held it inverted, in a peculiar kind of half-backwards grip, with the ends of the arms of the Y in the upturned palms of his hands. The main stem of the Y pointed almost straight up, but seemed to be in rather precarious balance because of the way he was spreading and twisting the arms at the same time against the spring of the wood.

"You have to stretch it till it feels almost alive and fighting you," Mr. Usherdown had told him. "And then you just concentrate your mind on oil, or whatever it is you're looking for.

It's the concentration that does it."

Simon could feel the almost-life of the twig, reacting against the odd strained way he held it; but his concentration fell far short of the prescribed optimum. He found, rather disconcertingly, that his mind was capable of simultaneous wandering in at least three directions.

One part of it remained solidly burdened with the involvements of the basic situation; another maverick element insisted on leaning back and making snide observations of the percentage of ham in his own performance; while whatever was otherwise unoccupied tried to think about oil, found it an elusive subject after picturing black sluggish streams of it in which revolved ponderous cams and gears, which merged into the oscillating stomachs of harem dancers, so that he switched quickly to the smog-belching sexlessness of a California oil refinery, and the gray haze creeping out to the Pacific Ocean where the sybarites thought it was too cold to swim but it would be wonderful to leap into straight out of the blazing sand and sky of Qabat . . . and he found that his intensely aimless circling had brought him smack up against the gate in the fence around the Emir's precious private lawn.

The impulse that seized him then was pure gratuitous devilment. Letting go the hazel twig for a moment, he indicated the barrier with an air of pained indignation.

There was an awe-stricken mutter among the spectators, and Tâlib seemed to swell up in preparation for an explosion; but the Emir cut in with half a dozen words that abruptly deflated him. The gate was opened, and Simon resumed the proper grip on his oddly shaped wand and walked in.

He went on trying to think about oil, because the effort helped him to maintain a convincing aspect of strenuous concentration, but a perverse slant of association insisted on linking it next with salad dressing, and then leaving only the lettuce, fresh picked and still jeweled with morning dew, like the drops that sparkled on the grass he walked on, relicts of the mechanical sprayer which until a few minutes ago had been scattering its priceless elixir over the sacrosanct turf . . .

What happened next was that the hazel began to twist in his hands, the upright stem of the inverted Y trying to swing over to point downwards, so startlingly that he involuntarily fought against it. But it was as if the wood had become possessed of a will and a power of its own, so that with all his strength he could not hold it, and it writhed

slowly and irresistibly over in his grasp until the stem pointed vertically down.

Simon Templar felt the sweat on his body chilled by a passage of ghostly wings, and would never know how he succeeded in keeping his face from looking completely fatuous.

He thought that a distant roar came to his ears from a hundred indistinguishable throats, though it might as well have been only a subjective amplification of the turmoil in his own brain; yet it seemed almost breathlessly quiet in the enclosure, where except for the Emir himself only Tâlib and one pair of sword-bearing guards had presumed to follow him. And in that brimming silence, he released the forked twig and extended his forefinger imperatively towards the spot where it fell, almost in the geometrical center of the Sheik's most treasured enclave.

"Here," said the Saint.

"You mean close here, outside, okay?" Tâlib said, shaken for the first time since Simon had known him into an almost incoherent dither.

The Saint's arm and pointing finger remained statuesquely rigid.

"I mean *here*," he repeated inflexibly.

Yusuf was studying him in thunderous gloom, his head on one side like an introspective vulture. Simon met the inquisitorial scrutiny without blinking, letting everything ride with the bet that the Sheik's cupidity would be stronger than his interest in horticulture—or at least that he was capable of the arithmetic to realize that a new oil well would buy a lot more lawns. And finally Yusuf spoke.

"Sheik say," Tâlib transmitted it, "you deliver, you get rich, pronto. Not deliver no goods, we cut your bloody head off. What you say, Mac?"

"You've got a deal, schlemiel," said the Saint blandly.

After that it became much less orderly—in fact, it rapidly lost all semblance of order. The Emir rattled off another cataract of injunctions, and stalked away. Tâlib began to shout supplementary orders in four directions. The privileged spectators who were inside the cordon of militia pressed forward, gesticulating and shrieking in friendly conversation until they reached the fence, which bulged and bent and then meekly disintegrated before the weight of their excitement.

At a word from Tâlib, the two Negroes closed in on Simon and hustled him unceremoniously through the jabbering mob. Outside the remains of the enclosure, the two other scimitar-bearers had already sandwiched in Mr. Usherdown, who looked limp and pallid with stupefaction. Simon's unit joined up with

them, and the four guards formed a hollow square with Simon and Mr. Usherdown in the middle and rushed them towards the palace entrance.

Simon caught one glimpse of Violet Usherdown, off to the side, with Yusuf making gestures towards the palace, and a few of his nobles gathering curiously around, and Tâlib heading across no doubt to volunteer the assistance of his extraordinary brand of English. And then he was pushed through the great doorway and hurried into the labyrinthine route that led back to what he now felt it was somewhat euphemistic to call the guest quarters.

The massive door slammed shut and quivered with the clanking of bolts, leaving Simon and Mr. Usherdown alone to gaze at each other.

At last Mr. Usherdown achieved a shaky voice. "Why did you do that, Templar?"

"I guess I was born ornery," said the Saint. "It was such a priceless chance to trespass on Joe's holy of holies, I just couldn't resist it. I was quite tempted to take my shoes off and do it in my bare feet, but I was afraid that might be going too far."

"But you didn't have to pretend to *find* there."

"I didn't. Your hazel twig did that."

"Nonsense. You made it look terrific, but I knew you were faking."

"I wasn't," said the Saint flatly. "I admit, I'd thought of it. But I hadn't quite made up my mind. I was still ad-libbing. And then that silly stick took over."

The little man stared at him unbelievingly. "It couldn't. You said you'd never done any dowsing."

"I haven't. But there has to be a first time for everything. Maybe I have unsuspected talents."

"Did it feel as if it was sort of magnetized?"

"It was the eeriest sensation I've ever experienced in my life. I couldn't control the damn thing. I tried. It almost tore the skin off my hands, twisting itself over."

"There's no oil under the palace—least of anywhere," Mr. Usherdown said stubbornly, but in blanker perplexity than ever. "I've held a rod around here myself—not too seriously, but you were wrong when you said nobody had tried. You must've been trying so hard, you got a sort of auto-suggestion. I've heard about things like that occasionally."

Simon shrugged. "Could be. It doesn't matter much, anyway. All I wanted to do was stall for time, and give Joe a new place to dig. While he's busy with that, we can work at digging ourselves out of this Arabian

Nightmare. What will the next move be?"

Mr. Usherdown shuffled to the nearest barred window, where the Saint joined him. The opening did not look out on the front of the palace, where the latest activity had been, but through it drifted echoes of clangings and hammerings and a natter of filtered voices erupting in occasional screeches of peak enthusiasm.

"Yusuf has a well-drilling rig of his own now," Mr. Usherdown said. "He bought it after the big company refused to put in any more wells, and he's only been waiting to be told where to use it. They must be setting it up already, where you told them to."

"How long will it take 'em to find out if it's doing them any good?"

"I don't know. I never had to study that sort of engineering. It seems to me if they were good enough they could get it working in less than a week, because they don't have any union hours, and then of course they'd be expecting something from the minute the drill started to go down. I don't know how many feet a day this kit he's got could drill, but they wouldn't wonder how deep they might have to go, either—"

"All right," said the Saint impatiently. "We can figure we've got a few days, anyhow."

"I wish I knew why they didn't bring Vi back with us," Mr. Usherdown said with a worried frown.

There was no answer to that for almost an hour, when the door was flung open again and Tâlib came in. He was accompanied by one of the possible eunuchs, an ordinary manservant, and a dumpy woman heavily swathed in drab veils. A militiaman armed with a Tommy gun brought up the rear, and stopped in the doorway with his weapon at the ready and a very competent look in his eye.

The woman b u s t l e d on through the apartment, located a suitcase, and began to stuff it with everything feminine that caught her eye. The manservant followed her, examining the articles which she discarded, opening drawers and cabinets, and occasionally tucking things away in his pockets.

"What's the idea?" bleated Mr. Usherdown. "And where's my wife?"

"Wife go live with Sheik's other wife mothers," Tâlib said. "Sheik don't want her live with you no more, no sir. But take yourself easy. Nobody hurt her. Sheik only make sure you don't be like jealous husband, perhaps bump her over yourself. Or perhaps you and friend try run off with her. Not bloody like it."

He spoke to the big Negro, who gave Tâlib his scimitar to hold while he made a quick but

thorough search of Simon's and Mr. Usherdown's persons.

The woman went out, lugging the heavy valise, with the manservant sauntering after her.

"Men starting to dig right now," Tâlib said. "You wait. Very soon we know if you full of balloons. We dig up oil, Sheik Joseph make you rich somofabitches. Not find oil"—he bared his teeth, and drew the back of the blade luxuriously across his throat before handing it back to its owner—"it's too damn bad, you betcha."

He strode out, followed by the Negro, and lastly the guard with the submachinegun backed out and kept the room covered with it from the passage until the door was closed again.

"Lovable fellow," drawled the Saint.

"What are we going to do?" whimpered the little man. "Did you see what he did? I know you only made it worse by telling them to tear up the Sheik's garden. Now they'll cut off our heads instead of just our hands."

"I can't see that it makes much difference, Mortimer. But Tâlib is probably exaggerating. We should have asked him what it says in the Koran about making divots in an Emir's green."

"And it wouldn't do us any good to escape now. Even if we got out, we wouldn't have any idea where to look for Violet."

Simon lighted a cigarette. "I don't think we're going to do any escaping for a while, anyway," he said. "Didn't you watch the valet character going through everything while the maid was packing up? And the Ethiopian who searched us didn't even leave me my nail file."

He had no reason to correct his hunch after they had gone over the apartment virtually inch by inch. Every article of metal that had a point or an edge or even a sharp corner had been neatly removed from their possessions. And when the first meal of their incarceration was brought to them, it was a reminder that in a country where the fingers were still the accepted eating utensil there would not even be the ordinary remote hope of secreting a fork or a spoon. As for the possibility of scratching away the very modern concrete in which the window ironwork was set with a shard from a broken dish, Simon could not even delude himself into giving it a trial.

"There must be *something*," persisted Mr. Usherdown numbly.

"There is," said the Saint, stretching himself out philosophically. "You can tell me the story of your life."

That was about what it came to, for the next five days, and some of it was not uninteresting either, once the desperate need

for any kind of distraction had got the little man started.

It may seem a shatteringly abrupt change of pace to suddenly condense five days into a paragraph; yet in absolute fact it would be nothing but outrageous padding to make more of them. Mr. Mortimer Usherdown's wandering reminiscences might have made a book of sorts by themselves, but they have no bearing on this story. Nor, in the utmost honesty, do the multifarious schemes for escape with which the Saint occupied his mind. Since they were built up and elaborated only to be torn down and discarded, it would be a dishonest use of space for this chronicle to get any reader steamed up and then let down over them.

It should be enough to say this time that if Simon Templar had seen any passable facsimile of a chance to make a break, he would obviously have taken it. But he didn't. The main door of the suite was only opened twice each day, when their meals were brought, and each time the operation was performed with such efficient precautions that it would have been sheer fantasy to think that it offered a loophole. The Saint was realistic enough to conserve his energy for a change that would have to come sometime.

It must be admitted, however, that when it came it was like nothing that he had dreamed of.

The first hint of it came around the middle of the sixth day, in the form of a vague and confused rising of noise that crept in on them even without any window that looked out on the front of the palace. When they noticed it, after the first idle surmises, they ignored it; then wondered again; then shrugged it off; then could not shut it out; then could only be silent and wonder, without daring to theorize in words.

It was an eternity later when the door was flung open, the four giant Negroes marched in, this time directed by Abdullah, and backed up by twice the usual detail of armed militia, and the Saint and Mr. Usherdown were once again boxed in a square of herculean muscle and marched headlong around the corridors and courtyards and corners that led back with increasing familiarity to the main forecourt.

Since Abdullah spoke no English, it was useless to ask questions, although Mr. Usherdown ineffectually tried to. And so they hurtled eventually through the grand portals into the ugly stifling heat and glare of the afternoon without any warning of what was to greet their eyes.

Simon was prepared for the tall skeletal pyramid of the oil derrick that now towered starkly amidst the withered remnants of Qabat's only garden. The voices

that he had heard from far off had also prepared him for the excited swarm of laborers, palace servitors, guards, and notables from the nearest mansions, who were milling vociferously around it. Nor was it surprising to see the Emir himself as a secondary focal point of the group, or Tâlib hovering behind him—or even Violet Usherdown standing near the Sheik, recognizable in spite of an orthodox veil by the copper curls which hung below a gold lamé turban which she had adopted.

What the Saint was incredulously unprepared for was the thick shining silvery column of fluid that shot up between the girders of the derrick and dissolved into a white plume of spray at the top.

For the first few dizzy seconds he felt only a foggy bewilderment at the color of it. Then as the observation forced itself more solidly into his consciousness he wondered deliriously whether he could have topped everything with the all-time miracle of bringing in a well that gave only pure refined high-octane gasoline. But in another moment his nose gave crushing refutation to that a l l u r i n g whimsy.

There was no smell of gas. And as his escorts wedged him through the encircling congregation and delivered him beside the Emir, at the very base of the scaffolding, a shower of drops fell on him, and he caught some on his hand and brought the hand right under his nostrils and then touched it with his tongue and knew exactly what it was.

It was water.

V

As if it had been only six minutes ago, instead of six days, Simon re-lived the capricious insubordinations of his mind, when he had been trying to concentrate on oil, and had been wafted through refineries to the ocean and through salads to irrigation. And it became clear to him that his latest discovered talent would need a lot more disciplining before it would be strictly commercial.

It also dawned on him that he was not his own only critic.

"Sheik know now, you one big damn thief," Tâlib bawled at him.

The Saint drew himself up.

In the superb unhesitating confidence of his recovery, he turned that flabbergasting moment into one of his finest hours.

"Tell Joe," he said coldly, "that he is one big damn fool."

Mr. Usherdown gasped, and even Tâlib blanched as he blurted out an indubitably expurgated rendition of that retort.

"I didn't promise to find oil," Simon went on, without waiting for the Emir's reaction. "I can't

find it if it isn't here, which you've already been told. I said I would make him rich. And I've done that. In Kuwait, isn't water worth more than oil?"

As that was repeated, a hush began to fall, and even the Emir's furious eyes settled into sharp and penetrating attention.

"Lots of places around here have oil," said the Saint disparagingly. "But I've given Qabat something that none of the others have. I was told that Kuwait is spending forty-five million dollars to build a pipeline to get water. Won't they be glad to save nearly two hundred miles of it and just bring the pipeline here, and give you the money instead? Is there any place around this Gulf that wouldn't trade you ten barrels of oil for one barrel of water? Let Kuwait and Dhahran sweat out their oil, while in Qabat you take their money and buy beautiful cars and jewels and walk about in grass up to your knees." He swept his arm grandly towards the jet of pure and glistening H_2O that was roaring merrily into the parched and burning sky. "This is what I've done for you, Joe."

Tâlib was still stumbling over the last few words when Yusuf demonstrated his lightning grasp of practical economics by enfolding the Saint in a grateful and embarrassingly affectionate embrace.

He then turned ebulliently towards Mr. Usherdown, but concluded the gesture much more perfunctorily, as if a different and disturbing thought had obtruded itself midway in the movement.

Suddenly Mrs. Usherdown's voice cut stridently through the rising babble around.

"I don't know what you're taking a bow for, Mortimer Usherdown," it said scathingly. "After all, *you* didn't do anything."

The interruption was on such a rasping note that Yusuf turned inquiringly.

Tâlib, whose expression had been getting progressively sourer as the atmosphere of congratulation and camaraderie seemed to be gaining the ascendant, brightened visibly as he translated.

The carnivorous gleam came back into Yusuf's stare as he stepped back and contemplated Mr. Usherdown with a new and terrifying exultation.

But instead of quailing under that baleful regard, the little man was not even aware of it. Instead of trembling with fear, he was quivering with the stress of what Simon realized was a far more cataclysmal emotion. He straightened up to the last millimeter of his height, inflating all that there was of his chest until the veins stood out on his neck, and sparks flashed from his small watery eyes.

"Why, you nasty creature," he squeaked indignantly. "I know what you're trying to do. But you needn't bother." He stuck out a straight skinny arm ending in a wrathfully pointing finger. "*I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you.* There!"

"Well," said Mrs. Usherdown tartly, "you're very welcome, I'm sure."

She turned, with a toss of her head, and strutted away towards the palace, bouncing her ample hips.

Tâlib construed the passage in the tone of voice that he might have used to bring tidings of a major disaster, and this time the hug that the Emir gave Mr. Usherdown was unmarred by any reservations.

"Sheik say," Tâlib droned gloomily, "you ask anything you want, you get it, if not too much."

"We'll settle for the price of one small oil well," said the Saint. "And our tickets on the next plane to Basra," he added casually, wishing that he knew more about geology, and vowing not to uncross his fingers until whatever freakish artesian source they had tapped had proved that it was capable of keeping the gusher flowing at least until he had taken off with Mr. Usherdown.

"Okay, dough kay," Tâlib said. "But tonight, Sheik order big feast and equally big whoopee."

Mr. Usherdown winked at the Saint, slapped the Emir on the back, and poked the outraged Tâlib in the ribs, while a broad beam of ineffable rapture overspread his lumpy little face.

"That's what I'm waiting for," he crowed. "Bring on the dancing girls."

To the utter consternation of a gentleman called "The Snake" the Saint contrives to be everywhere at once and Inspector Teal of Scotland Yard comes very close to the brink of apoplexy

THE MAN WHO WAS CLEVER

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the next SAINT

murder is no accident

by . . . David Dodge

It's not always easy to guess right about everything. You have to know your murderer.

THE MURDER wasn't even a side issue to my job, just a coincidence. I had dropped off a train at this little town in the Santa Clara valley to check on a bank embezzlement for a surety company that was paying me a monthly retainer. The sheriff already had the embezzler in hock, so all I had to do was talk to the bank officials and see if they intended to prosecute or leave it up to the surety company.

It was Saturday noon before I got there, and the bank president had left town for the weekend. I had to wait around until Monday to see him. That was how I happened to be at the golf club Sunday afternoon, when somebody knocked off a man named Hal French.

The sheriff took me to the club for lunch. It was a nice setup for a small town—eighteen holes of good grass, tennis courts, a swimming pool. The weather was hot and the pool was full of swimmers. When we passed the pool on our way up from

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We've always believed that the influence which a gifted writer may exert on events and people should be stressed more—that the dignity of art demands it. But David Dodge has quietly and conspiratorially made Fate herself his accessory in that respect, and his triumph is unique. You see, David Dodge wrote TO CATCH A THIEF, *the Hitchcock movie starring Grace Kelly and Cary Grant. And* TO CATCH A THIEF *took Miss Kelly to the South of France on the French Riviera, where she met the Prince of Monaco and*—see what happened!

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the parking lot, a girl wearing a red bathing suit was struggling, not too hard, to keep a couple of huskies in swimming trunks from throwing her in.

She yelled "Hi!" and "Help!" at the sheriff just as the boys got her by the wrists and ankles, swung her a couple of times, and heaved. She went under with a shriek of laughter and a defiant toss of her head.

I would have noticed her even if she hadn't yelled at us. She was a small brunette with a figure like a pin-up, and the two swatches of red Lastex she wore didn't do the figure any harm. The rest of the women in and around the pool could have gone home for all the attention they were getting. It was a good bet that the brunette wouldn't be popular with the local females.

I said, "Cute girl."

The sheriff grunted. "Too cute for her own good."

He didn't say any more, and I didn't ask questions. We sat down at a table in the veranda of the clubhouse and looked around for a waiter. Before we could order anything, a skinny man in a white coat came tearing around the corner of the veranda as if his pants were on fire. When he saw the sheriff, he stopped short.

"My golly, Sheriff, I'm glad you're here!" he gasped. His face was as white as his coat. "You better come with me!"

"What's the matter, Charlie?" the sheriff asked.

"Somebody killed Hal French!"

The sheriff's reaction was strange. He looked down toward the pool, where the little brunette was playing you-splash-me-and-I'll-splash-you with the guys who had pitched her in.

It was several seconds before he asked: "Who knows about it?"

"Just the Garrett boys and Tom Chester. They're in the locker room with—" the skinny man's voice broke— "the body."

"All right, Charlie." The sheriff stood up. "Don't say anything to anybody else. We'll take a look."

The "we" was all the invitation I needed. I followed them around the corner of the clubhouse and along a spike-scarred path to the locker room.

Charlie closed the door behind us when we went in. There was another door opening into what looked like the main club room, and an archway leading off to the showers. The sheriff walked over to lock the door to the club room before he did anything else.

The place smelled like any other locker room — sweaty. Three men, naked except for bath towels twisted around their middles, stood looking down at a body on the floor.

The dead man wore a pair of

loud shorts and one sock. He was big, without much fat on him, and had a Hollywood haircut that curled behind his ears. His feet were under a wooden bench and his head was cramped up against the base of a row of steel lockers. His jaw, hanging open, didn't look right.

Four of the lockers were open, and a round tray with four tall drinks on it sat on the bench. A putter with a thick-weighted head lay on the floor near the body. That was all I noticed right away, except that water was splashing on cement somewhere in the shower room.

The sheriff said, "Hello, Pat, Harry, Tom."

The three men all said hello as if it hurt them to move their mouths. The sheriff went over to the body and knelt beside it. First he felt for a heartbeat, then wriggled the loose jaw and ran his hand around under the back of the head. There was blood on his fingers when he stood up.

"His jaw is broken," he said as he watched the faces of the three. "His head must have hit the locker when he went down. What happened?"

Nobody answered right away. Charlie was clear across the room, standing guard by the door we had come in, and I could hear his breathing.

Finally one of the men—a stocky guy, short-legged, but built good above the towel—said, "We don't know. We were all in the showers when Charlie yelled. We ran out and found Hal lying there. He must have fallen and hit his head."

"He didn't hit the back of his head and break his jaw at the same time," the sheriff said.

None of them had an answer to that. The sheriff's eyes wandered from one man to another. They all had the same tight, guarded expression on their faces.

"Anybody in the showers, Charlie?" he asked.

Charlie left the door and went into the shower room. The water stopped running. He came out and said, "No, sir. They left the showers going when I called them."

"How long ago was that?"

"A minute, maybe two, before I found you. Mister Pat sent me to telephone your office. I was on my way to the phone when I saw you."

"Where were you when it happened?"

"Mister Pat sent me for drinks. When I came back, they were in the showers and I saw Mister Hal lying there. I thought he had fainted or something until I saw his face." Charlie swallowed hard. "Then I guess I just yelled. They all came running out together."

The sheriff looked at the man who stood farthest from the body. "You seem to have given

all the orders so far, Pat. Suppose you tell us everything that happened today."

The man he spoke to was a couple of years older than the one who had talked first, but they looked enough alike to be brothers—same features, same coloring, same stocky build. That made them the Garrett boys. And the third man, a tall slim kid with a thin crop of blond hair on his chest, was Tom Chester. I wanted to get it straight because nobody was bothering with introductions.

Pat Garrett said, "We had our regular foursome this morning. Lila wanted to swim, so I brought her along. She and I picked Harry up on the way and met Hal here. Tommy had a flat tire and was late, so we got a late start. We played eighteen holes, came into the locker room together, and stripped to take a shower.

"I sent Charlie for the drinks. When I went into the shower room, Harry was showing Tommy his new putter and Hal was still undressing. A minute or so later, I heard Harry and Tom come into the shower room and the showers start up. Three or four minutes after that, Charlie called us."

The sheriff turned to Pat's brother. "Hal was alone here when you and Tommy went into the showers?" he asked.

"Yes," Harry's voice was like Pat's, deliberately flat. "It was the first time I had used the putter, and Tommy wanted to see it. After he finished with it, Hal wanted to swing it. We left him trying it out."

"Nobody else was in the locker room or the showers?"

"No."

"Anything to add to that, Tom?"

The tall blond kid shook his head. He wasn't as cool as either of the others, but he didn't seem any more nervous than was reasonable in the circumstances. He said, "That's the way it was, Sheriff."

"Charlie."

"Yes, sir."

"Which way did you go when you went for the drinks?"

Charlie pointed at the door the sheriff had locked.

"You didn't meet anybody coming in or going out?"

"No, sir. I don't say nobody came in or went out, but I didn't see anybody. I was gone about five minutes, and the outside door was open. Anybody could have—"

"All right, Charlie. That will do for now. Go telephone my office. Tell Max there's been a killing here, and to call the coroner. Don't talk to anyone else. Wait until the coroner gets here, and then bring him in."

"Yes, sir."

Charlie went away. The sher-

iff said, "Better get some clothes on, boys."

While they were dressing, he got down on his hands and knees to look at the putter, not touching it. I was more interested in the damp footprints that led from the shower room to where the three half naked men were standing. But the prints were too smeary and too nearly dry for me to make anything out of them. I wandered into the shower room.

There were six shower stalls, uncurtained. They were in the middle of the room—two banks of three each, backed up against each other. I was feeling the hotwater pipes when the sheriff came in.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Looking for warm pipes," I told him.

"What will that give you?"

"I thought it would help to know what showers they were using."

I showed him the three showers that had been last used. Two were on the side away from the archway; one faced it.

"The man on this side could have gone out and come back without being seen by the other man on his side. But he'd have to take a chance that the man on this side wasn't facing the door. You could ask a few questions along those lines."

He said, "Maybe I will." But he didn't move. Something else was on his mind.

I said, "Of course if they're covering up for each other—"

"What makes you so sure one of them did it?" He wasn't looking at me. "Hal was alone out there for three or four minutes. Anybody who saw him come in could have followed him, done the job, and made a getaway before Charlie got back."

"Sure."

"Those boys aren't killers. I've known them all since they were kids."

"Okay." I turned away. He stopped me. "You don't believe it could have happened that way?"

I said, "It's nothing to me. I'll believe anything you want to hand out. But what kind of a nut, planning to kill a man, would follow him into a locker room on the bare chance that he would find him alone, the attendant gone, and three other men out of sight in the showers long enough for him to commit murder and get away without being seen?"

The sheriff took his hand off my arm.

I said, "Either Charlie did it, or one of those three left the showers for a couple of minutes while Charlie was gone. The others may be covering up for him and they may not. If it were up to me, I'd find out which

one had a motive for knocking him off and then put the pressure on until he cracked."

There was a stool in a corner by the towel rack. The sheriff went over to it and sat down. His shoulders sagged. "They all had a motive," he said. "The same one."

"What was it?"

"Lila Garrett, Pat's wife. The girl in the red bathing suit."

I got the wrong idea. He saw it in my face. He said, "No, I don't mean it that way. Tom's her brother, and Harry thinks Pat is a tin god. It was Hal."

"He was playing around?"

"He was trying to play around. You saw that business at the pool. Lila is too—friendly. There's nothing bad about her but you could get the wrong impression if you didn't know her. Hal was new in this town. He was Pat's boss at the packing plant, and Pat put him up for the club, invited him to his house, introduced him to people.

"He saw a lot of Lila, naturally, and Pat's job takes him out of town two or three times a week. Lila likes a good time, and Hal took her places when Pat wasn't around. There's been a lot of talk about it. You know how it is in a small town."

"Nothing behind the talk?"

"Not as far as Lila's concerned. I know her. She's as square as they come. But I think Hal was getting ideas."

"Looks like Pat's your man, then. He was the one who sent Charlie out of the locker room."

"I know him, too. I know them all." The sheriff sighed miserably. "Dammit, I just can't see them as killers. Any one of them would punch Hal in the nose if he had it coming. But murder—" He shook his head.

"Maybe one of them punched him in the chin."

"Hard enough to break his jaw—kill him?" The sheriff shook his head again. "I wish I believed it."

"What do you think happened?"

"I think somebody swung that golf club at him. I think it caught him on the chin, broke his jaw, and knocked him into the locker hard enough to crack his head. And I don't think it was an accident."

"No," I said. "It wasn't an accident."

I walked over to the archway and looked out. The three men were dressed. They stood just where they had stood before, in a row by the bench, waiting. They weren't talking, but if ever I saw the Three Musketeers in the flesh, they were it. One for all and all for one stuck out all over them.

I said, "So you want to break it or cover it up?"

The sheriff's eyebrows drew down in a scowl. I said, "If you want to break it, you're in a

tough spot. You have to pin it on somebody you like, and it's going to hurt, now and later. You'll do better to bring in outside help —somebody neutral."

He went on scowling. I said, "It will cost you one dollar. No guarantee."

He reached into his pocket without a word and handed me a silver dollar.

I said, "I'm retained. Better introduce me so they'll answer questions."

We went back to the locker room. He introduced me, without explaining who I was or anything else except that they were to answer questions. They looked at me the way three tomcats watch a strange dog coming down the street.

I said, "Which one of you was using the shower facing the doorway?"

Pat Garrett said, "I was."

"You didn't leave it at any time until Charlie called you?"

"No."

"You didn't see any other person leave the shower room?"

"Not until we all left together."

"Could you see the doorway?"

"When I was looking that way and had my eyes open. I washed my hair. There was a lot of soap in my face."

"Could anybody have left the shower room and returned without you seeing him?"

"I don't know."

The other two gave me the same kind of co-operation. They answered questions and wouldn't make any guesses. They hadn't seen anything or heard anything until Charlie called them. I was wrong about their being the Three Musketeers. They were the three little monkeys. See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil.

Charlie came in with the coroner while I was still trying to develop an angle. The coroner made a quick examination of the body and said, "Broken jaw, possible fractured skull. I can't tell about the skull for sure without an autopsy."

"In your opinion, could a blow with that golf club—" I pointed at it—"have caused either injury?"

The coroner bent down to look at the head of the putter. It was smooth, and nothing showed on it but a few grass stains. He said carefully, "In my opinion, a strong blow with that club would have damaged either his face or his skull considerably more than they appear to be damaged. A blow of exactly the right strength might have caused either injury, yes."

I thanked him.

A couple of the sheriff's men had come along with the coroner. They helped him get the body into a wicker basket and carried it outside. When they lifted it, something that had been under-

neath the body rolled across the floor. I picked it up.

It was an ordinary flashlight battery, a small, heavy, tubular steel cell about two inches long and an inch in diameter.

I waited until Charlie had closed the door behind the coroner and the sheriff's men before I said, "Whose is this?"

Tom Chester said, "Mine."

I tested it with my tongue across the terminals and didn't even get a taste. It was as dead as the body in the coroner's basket.

I said, "What good is a dead flashlight battery?"

"I've been using it to improve my grip. I'm trying to cure a hook."

"Let's see."

I tossed it to him. He laid it in the bend of his fingers, where the shaft of a golf club goes if it's held right, clenched his hand around it, relaxed his grip, and clenched it again.

"I work on it whenever my hands aren't busy," he said.

I said, "I've known golfers to exercise their fingers on a rubber ball. I never heard of anyone using a flashlight cell."

"It's better than a rubber ball. It's shaped more like the shaft of a club. There's more resistance too—"

That was as far as he got. Everybody around the club must have seen the basket going out to the coroner's wagon, because there was a hell of a hullabaloo outside. The door banged open before Charlie could catch it.

He stopped everybody but the little brunette in the red bathing suit. He couldn't have held her with a net. She ducked under his arm, and threw herself on Pat Garrett's chest.

"Pat! Pat!" She hugged him. "Oh, you're all right! I was so scared! What happened?"

Nobody else answered her, so I did. "Hal French was murdered."

She looked at me, and her face went white. Then she looked at her husband. Then she looked at her brother. Then she looked at her brother-in-law, her head turning like a clockwork doll's. There wasn't a sound in the locker room for a minute except the whispered gabble of the people peering over Charlie's shoulder in the doorway.

The girl took a deep breath and said, "Oh." That was all. She sat down on the bench as if her good-looking legs were tired. The three men stood there with the same old poker faces.

The sheriff cleared his throat and bent over to pick up the putter, holding it by the shaft close to the head. "Guess we ought to see if we can get any prints from this," he said. "Not much hope of picking anything off the leather, but it's worth a try."

"I'm more interested in the

flashlight battery," I said. "What was it doing under the body?"

Tom Chester said slowly, "I don't know. It must have dropped out of my coat when I hung it in the locker."

"Which is your locker?"

"That one." He pointed. It was a couple of feet from where the body had been lying.

"You carry the battery in your coat pocket?"

"Yes."

"How long have you carried it?"

"A month. Maybe six weeks."

"Has it helped your hook?"

"Some."

His answers had been coming slower and slower. Everybody knew that I was getting at something more important than his hook. But I wanted to think before I asked the next question. I wasn't sure about one thing.

I stepped over to his locker, took a driver from the bag of clubs inside, and emptied the ball pocket.

"I'd like to see you all hit a few drives," I said.

Somebody, I don't know who, let out his breath. Nobody asked why I was picking that particular time to promote a driving contest. We left the locker room, pushed our way through the crowd outside, and went out to the first tee.

Charlie followed us. So did the crowd. It was the quietest gallery I've ever seen. I handed Tom Chester the driver and teed up the first ball for him.

His nerves were good. He hit three clean balls. One went down the middle of the fairway, two hooked almost to the rough. He looked at me expectantly. I didn't say anything.

Pat Garrett was next. He hit them all down the middle—one, two, three, straight as a string, and not one closer than the two hundred and fifty yard marker.

His wife and I were the only ones who didn't watch the balls in flight. She never took her eyes off his face. In that next-to-nothing bathing suit, without any of the help that a lot of women get from the right kind of clothes and with most of her make-up left behind in the pool, she was still one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen.

I could understand why French had been getting ideas. And I could understand how somebody who knew her and loved her might have felt when the talk went around, when the cats on the back fence were gossiping . . .

Harry topped his first drive. The second one was pretty good, and the third one ended up twenty yards farther out than any of Pat's. They all looked at me, waiting.

I said, "Let's go back to the locker room."

The gallery was right behind us. I shut the door before they

could follow us in, but there was no key. I held the door until Charlie brought a chair to wedge under the doorknob, and then I pushed him outside. I had the door closed and wedged shut before he could argue.

The sheriff said, "What's on your mind?"

"Do you still want me to earn my retainer, Sheriff?"

He knew I had it then. He hesitated for only a moment. "Go ahead."

I turned around. Lila Garrett faced me, holding her husband's arm. Her brother stood at her side, and Harry was at Pat's elbow. One for all, all for one.

I said, "Mrs. Garrett, I'm a stranger here. Excuse me for what I'm going to say, because I'm only repeating what I've been told. There's been talk about you and Hal French. That kind of talk gets around in a small town. People make something out of nothing.

"Your husband and your brother and your brother-in-law knew there was nothing in it, at least as far as you were concerned. But they wanted the talk stopped. They must have all thought about it for a long time, wondering what to do. This afternoon, one of them decided to tell Hal French to watch his step."

She didn't blink an eye. They all waited for me to continue

I said, "He didn't want to bring anyone else into it. He meant it to be a private talk between himself and French. The opportunity came when French was alone here and the others were in the showers. One of them slipped out quietly and came back to the locker room. He had made up his mind to back up his talk with his fists if he had to.

"He didn't intend to kill French, and he didn't hit him with the golf club that French was still playing with. But French was a big man, maybe a tough man, and I think the man who came out of the shower room was afraid of him.

"At the last minute, he thought of something that would be useful in his hand if there were a fight. That was the flashlight cell Tom Chester carried in his pocket."

I held out my hand. "Give it to me," I said.

Tom Chester reached into his coat pocket and handed it over. I said, "You all knew he had it. You all had seen him working his fingers on it for weeks to strengthen his grip. His coat hung in his open locker. The man who killed French took it out of the coat as he passed and had it in his fist. I don't know what he said to French, or French's reply, but French was slugged. Like this."

I was standing opposite the end of the steel lockers. I wrap-

ped my hand tight around the heavy little battery and swung hard, being careful that all four knuckles hit square on.

It didn't hurt as much as I had expected. The steel plate of the locker bent like tin.

Lila Garrett closed her eyes. Her grip tightened on Pat's arm. The three men were as poker-faced as ever.

"It broke his jaw and slammed his head into the lockers," I said. "The man who hit him didn't hold the battery as tightly as I did. It flew out of his hand. French's body fell on top of it. The other man saw that he was dead. He didn't have time to recover the battery because he knew Charlie would be back soon. He was naked, still wet from his shower. He ran back to the shower room and was there with the others when Charlie came in and found the body."

There was a long silence. When the sheriff spoke, the words sounded as if he were wrenching them out of his guts. "Which one?"

"I'm not sure. It will be hard to prove. If either of the others saw him, they aren't talking and I don't think you can make them talk. But all three are natural suspects. When the story gets out, everybody's reputation will go to hell. The gossips will have it that the three of them ganged up on French and beat him to death because there was really something going on between him and Mrs. Garrett.

"As long as the true story never comes out, they'll make what they want to make out of it. On the other hand if somebody confesses, the talk will stop after it's been kicked around for a while. The killer will be tried by a friendly jury, because French was an outsider and the others are home-town boys. A good lawyer can get him off with manslaughter or third degree murder. He'll be out in three or four years."

By that time Tom Chester lifted his hand to stop me. "That's enough," he said. "You guessed it right except I wasn't afraid of him. I—"

"I guessed everything right, kid," I interrupted, loudly.

He was still looking at me with his mouth open when his sister said, "Tom!" and fainted.

I was right about the jury. Tom drew one-to-ten for third-degree murder and served three years and six months, a year less than the bank embezzler got for grand larceny. His sister testified that French had made a couple of serious passes at her while Pat was away. She hadn't mentioned it to her husband, because she didn't want to stir up trouble between him and his boss, but she told her brother.

The defense attorney made a strong point of the fact that

French outweighed Tom Chester by thirty pounds, and argued that a little thing like a flashlight cell snatched up in a moment of fear by a boy avenging his sister's honor could not be called a murder weapon.

Tom had enough sense not to talk too much. "Snatched up in a moment of fear," was the defense attorney's expression. He hung his whole case on what he claimed was a clearly established lack of premeditation, and the jury believed him well enough to keep Tom out of the gas box.

I guess none of the jurors had ever played golf because any dub can tell you there is nothing the matter with the grip of your right hand if you hook. When a man carries something that can be just as nasty as a length of gas pipe in his coat pocket — his right-hand coat pocket—for a month or six weeks, wrapping his hand around it every few minutes and feeling the solid, deadly lump it makes in his fist, it's hard to say exactly what he has in mind. But he isn't thinking about his golf game.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT
will be

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
with "The Man Who Was Clever"

CARTER DICKSON,
with "The Invisible Murderer"

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN,
with "The Banana Herder"

PETER CHEYNEY,
with "Velvet Johnnie Went to Prison"

MYRON DAVID ORR,
with "Death in New Guinea"

GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT,
with "The Code of the Rat"

and many others

tears for the jury

by . . . Christopher Bush

Jupiter Craigne was a flamboyant poser on the slopes of a very sinister Mount Olympus. But Death wears a more terrifying disguise.

JUPITER, father of the gods, had a head of superb golden hair and a curled, golden beard. So when an important playwright wrote *Trouble on Olympus* and Rupert Craigne took the part of Jupiter, Craigne — fair-haired naturally—grew a head of curly hair and a curly golden beard.

As a god he was magnificent, and when the play at last ended he still retained his beard. And that was why they nicknamed him Jupiter Craigne. He wore his golden hair and beard until the day they sent him to jail. All of which is quite a story—this story, at least in its beginnings.

It all happened in the days before Ludovic Travers was married. He came in late one night and found a telephone message, taken by his man Palmer. Would Mr. Travers run down to Brazenoak at eleven o'clock the following morning and see Mrs. Craigne on a matter of the most urgent importance.

"Craigne?" Travers said, and then Brazenoak recalled things. "That was the whole message?"

Christopher Bush stands high on the list of those scholarly-minded British mystery writers who favor a cat-and-mouse approach to murder, with a silken-glove attitude toward the criminal until Justice cracks down with an iron fist. A temperamental quirk, you might almost call it, and it finds exciting expression both in his suspenseful and widely acclaimed mystery novel, CASE OF THE SILKEN PETTICOAT, *(Dodd, Mead) and in this, his newest, crime puzzle.*

"Well, the lady was very apologetic, sir, and I was to say it was about Mr. Craigne."

"I see," said Travers thoughtfully.

"I was also to say, sir, that unless she heard from you canceling the appointment she'd expect you at eleven o'clock."

"Thank you, Palmer," Travers said. "We'll leave at nine-thirty unless something even more urgent comes in the morning mail."

But he was feeling a vague disquiet. A clever woman, Charlotte Craigne, and one with whom he had never felt wholly at ease: a hard, calculating woman, though capable of turning on an enormous charm. And, of course, he could not deny that she'd been commendably loyal in the case of Rupert.

Travers knew Rupert much better than he knew Charlotte. He had backed an early show of Craigne's and had made money. But he had declined to touch another. He had withheld all support even from *Trouble on Olympus*—largely because of certain deplorable tendencies and exalted ideas in the man himself. For the success of that play had really turned Craigne's head.

It had given him godlike ideas. To the genius of the born actor there had slowly been added, even during the long run of the play, a vast egomania. Travers had asked Craigne why he was not putting on a successor and now as the incident came back to him in retrospect he could see again the Olympian beard and hair and the large gestures and the besotted complacency of the man.

"No hurry," Craigne had said. "I may commission something. Hollywood, in any case, is bound to be wanting me at any moment."

Charlotte had been a part of those ridiculous posings and posturings—a Juno to his Jupiter—and it should certainly be added that Rupert's one virtue was his indifference to other women. But Travers knew it was no concern of his if Craigne was making a fool of himself.

What he did know was that few people had made so much money in so short a time or spent it so recklessly. Unless Craigne put on another successful play he was heading for financial disaster. Actually Craigne did do something. He thought himself above the law and tried a short cut. But the law was far too clever.

As the car slipped along quietly towards the coast that morning, Travers had a most informative talk with Palmer. Superintendent Wharton of Scotland Yard had a high opinion of Palmer and it wasn't difficult to see why. Palmer had both a retentive memory and a shrewd judgment.

"What do you remember about the Craigne affair?" Travers asked.

"You mean the Goodwood Case, sir? I remember it well. They sent telegrams from a country post office in an attempt to swindle the bookies." Palmer smiled. "And they certainly were out for a killing, sir. They'd have won thousands if they hadn't been caught. An ex-butler, if I remember correctly, was one of the principal figures."

"Sivley," Travers said. "Butler to Henry Potence whose house we're bound for now. Potence is Mrs. Craigne's uncle. Silvey had retired and was living with his brother-in-law, who was the sub-postmaster. Craigne made the third of the trio. He gave a kind of respectability to the affair. No one could imagine the great Rupert Craigne mixed up in anything shady."

"I thought the sentences rather light," Palmer said, "considering what they'd won and were out to win."

"There was no need to make them heavy, at least as far as Craigne was concerned. He came out of prison a ruined man. His one year was merely a gesture. Sivley got two years."

"A regular rogue, that one, sir. Claiming he'd retired when all the time, as his master testified in the witness-box, he'd been discharged. He must have been robbing him all the time, if I'm any judge of scoundrels. And didn't he do some boastful talking at the trial, sir?"

"He made some ugly threats against Craigne and Potence," Travers said. "He shouted that Potence was a liar and that Craigne had gotten him into the mess. He threatened to do them both in. But that sort of thing is common enough. Prison cools them off.

"Tell me something. Craigne was arrested for drunkenness and creating a disturbance a week after they let him out. Have you read anything about him since?"

"Yes—about a month ago," Palmer said. "The same sort of thing. He's a man with a grievance, sir. That's what he is and always will be."

"He's a poser as well. His idea now is to pose as a martyr."

"Has he much money, sir?"

"Lord, no!" Travers said. "Not a cent. Strictly between ourselves, his wife must be supporting him. Potence, her uncle, is a wealthy man and must be giving her a substantial allowance. She's been living with him ever since Craigne came out."

Palmer peered at a road marker. "Brazenoak three miles, sir. I thought I could smell the sea."

Everything about Brazenoak Grange looked fat and bulbous. The old-fashioned bay windows bulged, the huge conservatory seemed unduly pretentious, and old Henry Potence looked expansive in a well-fed way as he came down the steps below the bulging porch.

But Charlotte was as slim as ever, in decorous black with a string of matched pearls glowing at her throat with a luster tastefully subdued. As soon as the first greetings were over it became evident that Potence had no inkling of the real reason for that morning call. Charlotte, coolly competent, directed the talk and then led Travers into the garden, ostensibly to view the August roses.

"Uncle's an old dear, of course," she said, "but he has to be kept in the dark about all this." She turned suddenly and looked directly at Travers. "You were surprised to get my message?"

"Perhaps," said Travers deftly. "But not ungratified."

"It's Rupert again," she said, and did not elaborate.

"Bothering you, is he?"

"Not that. Though he knows he can rely on me. It's about Sivley for one thing. He's out of prison."

Travers smiled. "You're not taking those threats of his seriously?"

"I'm forced to," she told him fiercely. "Rupert has seen Sivley and is convinced the man's wholly vicious. He won't rest content until he's killed Rupert, and uncle too."

Travers checked the smile. "You're not serious?"

"But I am!" She turned her head and her lip suddenly puckered. Then her handkerchief was at her eyes.

Travers felt desperately uncomfortable. Somehow he could not quite associate tears with Charlotte Craigne. And at that same instant he became aware of a faint but peculiar smell. It was fairly close to him but he couldn't identify it, even though it was stronger than the scent of the roses. Some patent fertilizer or spray, perhaps, that had left a cloying residue. He didn't know, and now Charlotte was drying her eyes.

"I wouldn't let it worry me," he advised, reassuringly. "Honestly I wouldn't. Tell your uncle and let him inform the police."

"He mustn't know a thing," she said bleakly. "It would be a terrible shock to him if he knew that Sivley's been here. He was actually seen in the grounds last night."

"There's still no need for panic," Travers told her gently. "Let your uncle tell that to the police."

There followed an embarrassing silence. Travers stared at her, searching her face with his eyes.

"I'd better tell you why I really wanted you to come," she said at last. "I'm not only worried about Sivley. There's Rupert too. He's at Corburgh-on-Sea. If you remember, we used to take a villa there for the summer."

"Yes, but what's he doing there now?"

"It's dreadful," she said. "You know what a magnificent swimmer he was? Well, he's going to use that to call attention to his grievances." She shook her head. "I know what you think, and everyone else too. But he *wasn't* guilty. He was an innocent dupe. Sivley took advantage of a moment of weakness to deceive and trap him."

"We can discuss that later," Travers said abruptly. "I gather that Rupert's going to give an exhibition of swimming at Corburgh. Why? What does he hope to gain by it?"

"He's planning to make a tour of all the resorts near here. He's going to hire a boat and give exhibitions, and then he'll address the crowds—just to vent his spite on uncle, and for publicity. He's really trying to force uncle into giving him enough money to leave the country and live elsewhere."

"A kind of blackmail," Travers said bluntly. "Blackmail beginning at Corburgh. When does he start?"

"Today," she said. "I had a letter. At midday. Can't you see that crowd now—hooting and giving cat-calls? It's horrible. We've got to stop it. He'll listen to you. He always would listen to you. That's why I sent for you."

"Right," Travers said, and at that moment the stables clock struck eleven. "We'd better get away pretty soon. There's not too much time."

"I can't go like this," she said. "Wait for me at the car. I'll be out as soon as I can."

Travers was shaking an uneasy head and wishing to heaven he were elsewhere. It would be a dreadful scene when Craigne tried to talk to that holiday crowd. He could imagine him standing up in the boat, golden-bearded and golden-haired, gesturing and declaiming. Not quite the same hair and beard, of course. The prison barber had seen to that. The new growth would be a flaunting gesture and a defiance.

It seemed a very long time before Charlotte came back to a silently pacing Travers.

"I simply couldn't get away from uncle," she said. "But there ought to be plenty of time."

Travers had to make a careful business of those ten miles. The lanes were narrow and winding and it was alarmingly close to noon before the car breasted the last rise and Corburgh was in full view. There, in front of the long line of houses, was the curve of beach, garish with awnings, tents, colored bathing boxes and umbrellas. Dotted about the sea were the heads of swimmers, and yet, as they neared, there was a curious hush. A boat lay about a hundred yards offshore and several dozen people were crowding on the beach.

"Oh, my God! We're too late." Charlotte was gripping Travers' arm, and staring straight ahead.

"I'm afraid you're right," Travers said. "There's Rupert, in that boat."

His arm was extended, though there was no need for him to point. From that distance of a scant hundred yards the boat was plainly visible. In the stern stood a figure in white bathing costume and the sun shone on his golden beard and made a golden halo about his head.

He was making wide sweeps with his arms and then bowing to the men and women on the beach. Then suddenly he poised, and dived, and there was a white crescent above the water and nothing else.

Travers, still staring at that white patch, reached for Charlotte's hand.

"Don't worry. I'll see him when this stunting's over."

His grip slowly tightened and then all at once he was out of the car. An arm had arisen from the sea as if in a frantic appeal for help. Travers paid it little attention. A new stunt, perhaps —a pretence of drowning to amuse the crowd.

But it wasn't! People were suddenly running along the beach. Others were shouting. A boat was putting out. Men were swimming.

"Stay here," Travers said. "Something seems to have happened . . . Steady now. Steady!"

Charlotte swayed, and slumped limply to the floor of the car.

"She's fainted, sir," Palmer said.

"I have eyes," Travers told him testily. "Go across to that house and get help. I'll find out what's actually happened."

It was quite some time before he returned. Charlotte was standing by the car, her eyes still red with weeping, but with scarcely a tremor in her voice.

"I know," she said. "You needn't tell me. He's dead."

"If you know—it won't be such a shock," he said. "It was an attack of cramp. The best swimmers are helpless against that."

"Can I see him?"

"No one can see him," Travers said. "The currents are pretty strong out there. The local people say he's been carried out to sea. It may be some time before the body comes ashore. You must try to be brave."

She gave a last look seaward and got into the car. Travers got in with her and it was Palmer who drove the car on.

She did not speak for several minutes. "You're sure it was cramp?"

"Everyone is sure."

"It couldn't have been—Sivley?"

Travers said: "Perhaps you'd

better not talk about it any more. Not right now."

She refused to be silenced. "But if he were unwell? If he'd been poisoned! Rupert said Sivley would get him!" She was shivering violently now.

Travers held her arm and he spoke almost angrily. "Don't talk nonsense. It's sheer lunacy imagining things like that."

She sank back, and closed her eyes.

"And one thing's going to be done whether you like it or not," he told her. "When we get to the Grange, you're to go straight upstairs. I'll have a word with your uncle."

But as the car drew in at the drive he saw that two other cars were standing directly in front of the porch.

"Hello," he said. "Looks as if you've got visitors. That's going to make things a bit awkward."

He helped her out. As they started up the steps a uniformed constable suddenly appeared at the door and put out a hand.

"You can't come in here, sir. Nor you, madame."

Travers stared. "But this lady lives here! What on earth—"

"That's all right then, sir. Mrs. Craigne, is it?"

"Mrs. Craigne it is," Travers told him impatiently. "My name's Travers. But what's been going on here? A burglary or something?"

"Worse than that, sir," the constable told him quietly. He glanced at Charlotte Craigne. "I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you, miss. Your uncle's dead. He's been murdered."

Her lips parted. Then she swayed, and would have fallen if Travers had not caught her.

"Murdered, you say?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—stabbed. Only a short time ago. They're searching the grounds now."

"Do you know who did it?"

"Yes, sir. A man called Sivley. He used to be butler here. As far as I can gather, Mr. Potence used always to be in the rose garden till lunch on fine days and Sivley was seen going that way. Then Mr. Potence didn't come to lunch and that's how they happened to find him, sir."

"You think you'll get Sivley?"

"Well, we're cordoning off the district and there are more men coming," the constable said. "I wouldn't give him more than twenty-four hours."

But that capture of Sivley was to prove more drawn-out than had at first seemed likely. Days began to go by and Sivley seemed to have vanished as thoroughly as the central figure in a Maskelyne illusion. Then Scotland Yard took over. In addition to the usual Chief-Inspector, George Wharton himself came down, for he had handled the Goodwood

Case which had sent Sivley to jail.

Wharton soon discovered that Sivley had been seen with Craigne in a side road behind Corburgh cliffs two nights before the murder. The two were having high words. Then, apparently, Craigne had talked Sivley round and they had gone off together with some show of amiability.

Travers often worked with Wharton and Wharton was glad of him now, even if Travers was having very much of a free hand. Most of his time was spent in driving round the countryside as if convinced that Sivley was still lurking in the district.

"You're wasting your time," Wharton told him. "No houses have been broken into. That being so, tell me where he's getting his food from?"

"Maybe from the ravens," Travers said with the irritating, ironic flippancy which he could sometimes assume. "But he might have laid plans well ahead. Someone may be helping him."

Wharton grunted. "Who, for example?"

"I don't know," Travers said. "But I'll bet you a double whiskey that at this very moment he's still within ten miles of Brazenoak Grange."

"I'll take you," Wharton said promptly. "All the same, if you have an idea where he is, why the devil do you keep on looking?"

Henry Potence left a substantial fortune. The son, in Singapore, got the bulk of it. Charlotte Craigne got twenty-five thousand pounds, but it was tied up so tightly that had Craigne still lived he would not have benefited by a penny.

Travers saw Charlotte after the funeral and offered condolences. "I expect you'll want to take a long rest," he said.

There was a troubled uncertainty in her eyes. "I haven't made up my mind," she said. "I'll probably go to the States, but that's confidential. A friend wishes me to join her in Boston. In America nobody will know me, especially if I take my maiden name. It would mean new interests, a break with the past."

It was a few days after that, and on a Thursday morning, that Travers rang George Wharton.

"I've got some news for you, George. I think I know exactly where Sivley is."

Wharton gave a little gasp, then a grunt. "And where's that?"

"I can't tell you yet," Travers said. "There's a highly important job of work to do first. I want you to wax the ends of that mustache of yours and rig yourself up like a stage Frenchman.

"Don't ask questions, George, but do as I say. You can speak the lingo. Be at Liverpool Street Station at two o'clock this afternoon and keep an eye out for

me. And here's what I want you to do . . ."

It was half-past two when Travers arrived at the boat-train platform. A Frenchman in a broad-brimmed hat was leaning from a corridor window and Travers made for the nearest door. As he entered the first-class compartment he gave a little gasp of surprise.

"Good lord, Charlotte! What on earth are you doing here?"

Charlotte seemed even more startled than he was. "What are *you* doing here?" she countered.

"My car's in dry dock," he said, "and I'm going to Harwich to meet some friends."

He gave a meaningful look at the elderly man huddled in a far corner of the compartment and she responded with a quick shake of the head as if to assure him that she was traveling alone. Travers spread papers and periodicals, and began to talk in lively fashion.

"I hate trains. I'm lucky indeed to have you for company. You're meeting people too? . . . And what about your future plans? Or haven't you definitely decided yet. I'll move opposite and you can tell me all about yourself."

The whistle shrilled and the train began to move. The compartment door opened and there was the Frenchman. He gave a little bow and a lift of his hat as he looked at the near corner seat.

"This place," he asked. "She is taken?"

Travers grimaced, and he and Charlotte exchanged quick, amused glances.

"The seat's quite free," Travers assured him. "Here—let me move these papers."

The Frenchman settled in the corner, but only for a minute. He too began to make conversation and Travers found it impossible to shake him off. But at last he subsided in his corner again.

"This paper," he said. "You permit that I read?"

"Take this magazine," Travers told him. "There's an article in it that might interest you." He flicked the pages over. "This one. You'll find it most interesting."

But the article wasn't nearly as absorbing as Travers had imagined, apparently. A minute or two and the Frenchman laid it aside and settled down to a nap. Presently his head was nodding.

"Amusing old boy," Travers whispered to Charlotte. "Still, he's helped to pass away the time. What about early tea? Would you like to have it served here?"

He pushed the bell and inside of five minutes a tea-basket arrived. By the time the miniature meal was over and their cigarettes were alight, the brakes were beginning to grind.

"Slowing for Colchester," Travers said.

The Frenchman woke up with a start. He peered through the window and caught, apparently, the name on the signal-box. He got to his feet and beamed apologetically.

"Here I meet some friends," he explained. "I—how do you say it?—signal from the window and they see."

He stepped across the extended legs of the elderly man in the far corner and lowered the window. Then, as the train was almost at a halt, he stepped quickly out to the platform and did his signaling from there.

Travers had arisen too and was standing as if on guard, his back to the corridor door. Charlotte stared, then half-rose. Her face suddenly whitened, for police officers were in the compartment and there was a quick scuffle and a protesting cry.

Travers looked down. Charlotte's cold blue eyes met his in a level stare. There was no pleading or fear in them, but her face looked hard and drawn.

"I'm afraid they're taking you too," he told her.

He flushed as Wharton's men snapped handcuffs on her wrists. Perhaps it was with a curious shame for the furtiveness of it all. And he stayed there in that empty compartment until the whistle shrilled again.

Wharton was waiting for him near the refreshment room. "I've a car here," he said. "You and I can go back together. Those two are already on the way."

He and Travers sat well behind the driver. Nothing was said till the car was clear of the town.

"Well, that's a job done," Wharton said. "When you gave me that magazine which told me the man in the corner was the one we wanted, I was dead sure he was Sivley. How you knew he wasn't really staggers me. Just how did Craigne work it?"

"It was easy for a man with his knowledge and ability," Travers said. "What I discovered in my travels was that a bathhouse had been rented on the beach—the very last bathhouse of all. It had been rented by a fattish man with dark hair and a heavy jaw. But about Craigne. When he came out of prison he grew his hair and beard again and he wore both until the very last moment.

"Then he crewcut his hair and shaved off his beard and darkened the stubble. When he got into that boat he was wearing a golden wig and a false beard. The bathing costume he wore was a highly conspicuous white and beneath it was one of sober blue and under that was a neat, dark wig.

"The pretended cramp came. No head appeared but only an uplifted arm. Off came wig and

false beard and white costume, to be tucked well inside the blue costume. All the time he was swimming under water and he hadn't very far to go to reach the far edge of the crowd and his bathhouse. Last of all, on went the dark wig, the most important aspect of the disguise.

"Remember that everybody's eyes were on the spot where he had been last seen. Who was to notice an ordinary-looking young man wearing an unobtrusive blue costume—a dark-haired young man? Craigne just carefully popped his head up and that was that. No one was interested in him. What they were interested in was a man with golden hair and beard, in a white bathing costume.

"The rest seems obvious. Craigne changed in that hut and went off to Brazenoak—probably by motorcycle. One was heard at about the time of Potence's murder. In the woods near the house he put on the Sivley disguise he'd used before when he'd taken care to be seen prowling round the house. Then he went to the rose garden and knifed Potence. The rest is still more obvious."

"Yes," Wharton said, and gave his usual grunt. "Simple, when you know how. A put-up job between him and his wife."

"Exactly. And I was brought down specially to be an absolutely reliable witness. She wanted Potence's money and she just couldn't wait."

"Yes," Wharton said again. Then he cocked an eye. "What about Sivley? What happened to him?"

"There's a gravel-pit, partly under water, between Brazenoak and Corburgh," Travers said. "I think Craigne got into touch with him as soon as he came out of jail and got him down to Corburgh. I think the motorcycle was Sivley's. My idea is that you'll find both Sivley and the motorcycle in that quarry."

"I'll get on to it at once," Wharton said. "But what about spilling the rest of the beans? How did you first get a line on all this?"

"Well, I invested a small sum in having Charlotte Craigne watched. When I knew she'd booked two seats—you can do that, as you know—on that train for Harwich, and after telling me she was going to the States, I was pretty sure. Also she ought to have gone direct from Brazenoak the few miles to Harwich, which gave me the idea she was meeting Rupert in town and traveling with him. They were making for the Continent, of course."

Wharton was clicking his tongue impatiently. "Yes, but how did you get on to the Craigne business?"

"Oh, that," Travers said. "All sorts of things. Bringing me in.

The exact timing so that we got to Corburgh at midday. The fact that Craigne wore that white bathing costume. A man of his taste would never have worn so conspicuous a costume without a very special reason."

"Doesn't seem a lot to me to build a case on," Wharton said dubiously. "You say that was all?"

"Well, not exactly," Travers said. "There was something else, right at the beginning. The drop too much."

"The drop too much?" Wharton frowned. "You're referring to Craigne and his liking for liquor?"

"Not exactly," Travers said. "But that morning in the rose garden, George, Charlotte cried. I knew Charlotte Craigne. She might throw a fainting fit but she could never cry. Yet she did. She put her handkerchief to her eyes and the tears simply streamed. And they were real tears too. But there was a faint smell in the air. Palmer smelt it too when she did some crying with him just after Craigne went under. The sort of paper Palmer reads on Sundays would call it a Divorce Court smell."

Wharton stared. "And what the devil's that?"

"The kind of stuff in smelling-salts. Ammonia, applied sparingly and with discretion to a handkerchief. Tears for the jury. Not too much of it, of course. Just enough. Unhappily for Charlotte she used just a drop too much."

A murder that looks like the work of Velvet Johnnie, a likelier suspect with an iron-clad alibi, and a shocking lag in police procedure fail to deter Detective Horn in the pursuit of his duty

VELVET JOHNNY WENT TO PRISON

By PETER CHEYNEY

in the next issue

cinderella wore black

by . . . Steve Fisher

A man who tries to recapture a triumph that is lost to him forever may end up abandoned and unmourned—in the morgue.

THE SIGN WAS purple neon, like a sign in Paris. It went on and off at five-second intervals and was particularly effective on a rainy night. HAPPY HOLTZ—*Builder of Beautiful Bodies.* Below was a legend in orange neon: *Maker of Stars.* It meant, really, that Happy Holtz was the maker of muscles or curves on male and female actors.

The sign sloped in an arch over the main entrance of an eight-story building in a shabby section of Hollywood Boulevard. It was nearer Western than Vine, and towered haughtily over the rooftops of squat brick shops whose windows advertised such wares as: *Pots, Pans & Playpens* or *Shoelaces & Girdles. Nylon Blouses.*

The building was for the most part untenanted, or officed by real estate salesmen, and that was why Mr. Holtz had been able to rent the entire top floor for a quite nominal figure. He employed Filipino boys in bright purple uniforms who

We can remember—it wasn't so long ago—when Richard Sale, Steve Fisher, Frank Gruber and several other young writers were passing in and out of magazine offices in New York City, leaving neatly typed manuscripts on the desks of friendly editors. Now they've all become the exact opposite of sunset *celebrities on Sunset Boulevard. In fact, we've lost count of the times we've seen Steve's name written large on the silver screen. And here's one of his most exciting mystery yarns, featuring the irrepressible Hollywood sleuth, Tony Key.*

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stood post on the elevator twenty-four hours a day.

All through the long California nights Mr. Holtz's two husky assistants—strong-man models in ebony—remained on duty. They were conditioned to remain ever alert—to massage back into consciousness any inebriated celebrity, or to fling bodily into the torture chambers of a Turkish bath any director or writer who stumbled in during the wee small hours before dawn, screaming incoherently about production budgets.

"Always leave them laughing, "Happy Holtz said, because that was the way he talked. He hadn't spoken an original sentence in years.

"The trouble is, you go to too many B pictures," Tony Key said. Then he grunted, wheezed, and was silent.

For it was mid-afternoon now and Tony, in shorts, lay stretched face-down on Turkish towels laid across a hard metal training table. Happy Holtz, wearing a purple sweat suit that covered him from neck to ankles, like long underwear or ski togs, had climbed up on Tony's legs, and was sitting there like an Easter rabbit, pounding his sharp knuckles into Tony's bare, undefended back.

Happy Holtz's hair was red, wiry, and stood straight up on his head. His face was tanned the color of deer hide, and on his lips was his perpetual grin.

"The very seat of my troubles are," he said, in his ham actor idiom, "that I give too much for too little. From a tiny acorn my business sprang, and now—" he waved his hand at the glossy pictures which lined the wall of the gym—"look at all those stars! Before taking my personalized physical culture lessons, they were mere flesh pots! The oomph of Susan Hayward, the statuesque form of a Mary Russell. *I* did that!"

"I suppose," Tony grunted, between smacks on the back, "you even knitted Lana Turner's sweaters—the kind she wore before she took to riding in Egyptian chariots."

"No. No, I could never knit," Happy Holtz reported soberly. He was jerking Tony's shoulders in and out of their sockets now.

"But consider the exquisite poise, the pulsating walk, the tantalizing posture of Helen Lane. Why, when she was brought to me she was just a scrawny slip of a girl; she'd been working the night shift at a barbecue stand over on Wilshire." He sighed. "Now she is a big star. It is my personal triumph!"

He paused, merrily thumping Tony in the ribs. "Are you going to the premiere of Miss Lane's new picture tonight?"

"No," Tony gasped.

Over on the next table a large masseur was working over a

flabby producer. The producer was George Wood, and he lay on his back, smoking a cigar as the massage attendant rubbed him down.

"I tell you it's awful!" Mr. Wood was saying to the boy. "I can't *stand* it any more! Ten times a day they pull the same thing. Every fresh kid in town pulls it. They walk up, slap me on the back and say: 'Holly, Wood.' Get it? Just because my name's Wood—"

The boy grinned. "Holly, Mr. Wood."

"You, too!" Wood said.

In the background a director and a publicity writer, garbed in trunks, were playing a furious game of ping pong. In a corner of the gym a blond B-picture star was working out on the punching bag. The main door opened now and a harassed Filipino in a purple uniform entered, with Betty Gale, platinum blonde, lovely and vivacious, hard on his heels. Betty was wearing white silk slacks and open-toe sandals, with a peasant handkerchief fitted over her head and tied under her chin.

The Filipino began explaining to Mr. Holtz that he had tried to keep the girl out, but she had reached Tony now. He sat up straight, blinking, his black hair loose and curly on his head.

"What's the idea having it arranged so that nobody can reach you by phone?" she asked.

"I—I wanted quiet," said Tony.

"You'll need it before *this* day's out," she snapped.

She glanced around. Holtz was walking with the Filipino back toward the door.

"There's been a murder," Betty went on, her voice low. "Remember what a murder is, dear? You're paid to solve the crimes in this town and to keep them on the Q.T.—out of the papers. World's highest paid detective! And look at you!"

"I—I—"

"A small-time picture agent's been murdered. Enough scandal can be stirred up about him to smudge the whole industry. But nobody could find you. And now there are detectives and reporters all over the place!"

Tony Key operated the Hollywood Murder Agency and Betty was his assistant. A syndicate of producers contributed to his weekly salary with the idea that he would solve all crimes that had to do with picture people, big or small. But so far as the studios were concerned, it was even more important to keep publicity of such events from the press than it was even to reach a successful solution.

"I'll get dressed," he said.

"Never mind!" said Betty Gale. She was living beauty—something far more tantalizing

than any of Happy Holtz's posters of gorgeous curves and bosoms. Betty, her platinum hair on her shoulders, rolled at the ends, was beautiful, period.

"There isn't time to dress," she went on. "Just jump into your slacks. You can slip into your shirt and put on your shoes and socks in the car on the way over."

"Okay." He was up. With a towel wrapped around his body, he headed for the lockers.

"How are you going to convince the boys that *this one* isn't murder?" she called after him. "I'll be damned if I know!"

II

THE APARTMENT was shabby, one of those three-room bachelor suits on Highland, decked out in brown leather, and with cement walls painted artistically to resemble pine wood. The corpse of Sammy Lewis was in the study.

He had been a large man, forty-odd years old, nearly bald; and in a certain way handsome. He wore a sport shirt open at the throat, exposing the thick black hairs on his chest. His white shoes were badly scuffed, and the cuffs of his trousers needed mending. He had been shot three times through the stomach.

The weapon had been found on the floor beside him. It was his next-door neighbor who had heard the shots and called the police. But the apartment had been locked from the inside and they had to break down the door.

The coroner was rising now. Pressed back against the walls were reporters, and wandering about the room were detectives. Police Captain Mickey Ryan—a bantam, with a red face like a monkey's and bushy white hair—was explaining the case to Tony.

"I'm sorry about the mob in here, Tony. Local cops were called. We gave you two hours' grace. Then when you couldn't be located, the homicide squad came down. Of course, they brought reporters with them."

Tony nodded glumly. He felt almost sick.

"Funny thing," Ryan said, "it looks like one of those locked room cases. *All* doors and windows were secured from the *inside*. That's an absolute fact! We checked up on every detail. The guy was locked in—and yet he was murdered. One of *those* things!"

Tony thought about that. He was still buttoning up his shirt, and he hadn't yet had time to lace his shoes securely. His mind worked fast. Now he motioned the doctor to his side.

"Give me the verdict, Doc," Tony said, "only *whisper* it!"

"Murder," Dr. Kramer replied. "No guy could've held a

gun out in front of him and shot himself in the stomach *three* times. And from powder burns, and examining the murder gun, it's certain there are that many bullets in him."

Tony nodded gravely. "Listen, stick with me, no matter what I say. If you *don't,* pal, it's your job!"

The doctor looked bewildered.

Tony looked out at the reporters, lifted his hands. "Gentlemen, Dr. Kramer has reached a verdict. As you all know, all of the doors and windows in this apartment were locked from the *inside*. We are on the tenth floor and there are no terraces—only steep walls and a flimsy drainpipe. There's no way in which a murderer could have escaped —*if* it was a murder! It would then be a whale of a puzzle, wouldn't it? But, of course, gentlemen, this thing is not murder. I guess I'm as sorry about it as you. I should like to shake the confidence of so ingenious a killer."

He turned smilingly to the coroner. "Your *official* verdict, sir?"

"Suicide," Dr. Kramer said shakily.

There was bedlam, attempts to get to the coroner. But the cops began chasing the reporters out. One by one they left. Tony glanced at Mickey Ryan.

"Throw the cops out, too," he said. And to Dr. Kramer, who was tugging at his sleeve: "I know, I know, little man. At the morgue you'll have to list it as murder. But don't worry. By the time you get around to an inquest I'll even have the killer for you."

Betty Gale looked up sharply. "Rash promises, Pop."

"Well, I stalled those young newspaper pups, didn't I?"

"Yes, but unless you arrest the murderer damn soon and get the whole thing silenced they'll find out it's homicide—and spread it all over the headlines!"

"*I'll* do the worrying, my sweet," he said acidly. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all, big shot," she said. "But look." She turned and unlatched two of the casement windows. They opened inward, but nothing else happened. "They're supposed to *close,*" Betty said desperately.

She kept her eyes on the windows, but they stubbornly remained open. Tony strode forward and looked out. The street lay far below, the roof two floors above. Tony pulled his head in.

"Skip the whole thing," Betty said . . .

An hour later the corpse had still not been removed and Tony and Betty were alone in the apartment with it. Tony was stretched out on the divan, swirling about a gin drink.

"Gin—imagine!" He glanced over at the corpse. "Sammy,

were you *that* broke? Couldn't you have anything better than gin in your ice box?"

"He's got stacks of bills in the drawers of his desk," Betty said.

She had made half a dozen phone calls to the Tony Key office for information from the files, and now she was sorting through stacks of pictures, correspondence and old contracts.

"I think he was using this apartment as his office as well as his home," she went on. "When a ten percenter gets down to that, he's hard against it!"

"Yeah. Well, face up to it, Betty. What has this remarkable combination of brains on my part and effort on yours netted us?"

She rose, her eyes reproachful.

"Cover Sammy up first," Tony said. "I don't mind discussing the dead, but I hate to look at them while I'm doing it."

She covered the body with a table cloth. Tony sat up, nursing his drink. He lit a cigarette. Betty sat in a chair opposite, still sorting through pictures.

"As far as we can find out," Tony said, "about six years ago Sammy Lewis was doing well. In fact, he *discovered* Helen Lane. He met her at a barbecue drive-in stand as reams of publicity will testify. He thought she had talent. He spent a lot of money and time on her, building her up.

"Meanwhile, he fell in love with her. For awhile they were engaged. Then suddenly, on the day she received her first starring role at Paramet, she left him flat. She broke the engagement, and bought out her actor's contract with him for cold cash. From that moment on she avoided seeing him, or talking to him on the phone. And in the five years since then she's become one of the biggest stars in town."

"I'd say offhand," Betty affirmed, "that by giving him the gate, she played a lousy trick on poor Sammy."

"Yes. But he had a reputation around town as a heel, anyway. People figured she had some reason that she hadn't revealed —and not many blamed her."

"Although *he* made her a star?"

"Exactly," said Tony. "He saw her through the whole process of build-up. He must have been gaga about her and when she walked out, it hurt. It seems that he never got over it. From what I've been able to learn so far from the fragments out of his past—letters, bills, and the publicity stories he sent around to the papers—he was bitter about it. He brooded all over the place."

"I can't say that I blame him."

"He decided," Tony said,

"that if he could do it once, he could do it again. He'd taken from nowhere a girl who had nothing and built her into a package of glamor. He set out with just one purpose in mind. He toured barbecue stands in search of another Helen. These old publicity stories tell of his quest for the golden frail."

"That's good," Betty said, nodding. "You wish you could have thought of it."

"It's lousy," Tony said, grimacing. "Anyhow, he figured he had to find the new girl at a barbecue stand in order to duplicate the original in every respect."

"And did he?"

"I think he did, but I'm not sure. We'll have to get back to the office, so I can do some more rummaging around through our files." Tony groaned. "Gypsies, that's what we are! Always moving around somewhere. Why can't we stay here and drink gin and talk to Sammy?"

"No," Betty said, "let's go to the office."

III

IT WAS AN elegant office on the Sunset Strip, and when they arrived, Producer George Wood was seated in a white leather chair, puffing furiously on a cigar. Happy Holtz, in gray sweat trousers and a white sweat shirt—with the name of his gym on it in big red letters—was walking around and around on the thick black carpet, his hands behind his back.

Betty moved past them, and into the office. Tony waited in the reception room to talk to George Wood.

"Holly, Wood," he said.

Wood held his head, and Happy Holtz stopped his waltzing mouse jaunt.

"Good afternoon, Superman," Tony said.

"Hello, Tony. Tell us about it."

"About what?"

"Sammy Lewis," Holtz said. "I hear he committed suicide. Heard it in a radio bulletin." He was very excited. "The rascal owes me two thousand dollars! Do you know if he left any—any estate?"

"Yeah. A couple of old cigar butts."

Happy Holtz sighed, shrugged and turned away. George Wood was on his feet now.

"I was anxious to know about Sammy, too," he said. "I drove over with Happy. My studio was dickering with him about this new girl of his, Kiki."

"Then he *had* found a new girl?" Tony said.

"Found one?" Wood echoed. "Chum, we were offering up to five hundred a week for her services—and he was still holding out."

"The hell you say!"

Wood nodded. "But that isn't the worst. And this is where I thought you could help me. We've been trying for two days to locate this kid Kiki to see if we couldn't make some kind of a deal with her personally. And she's missing! I don't know whether Sammy Lewis was hiding her or what. But I've had private detectives looking for her for forty-three hours now. And there's no trace!"

Happy Holtz was wringing his hand. "I want to find Kiki, too," he said. "I was the one who trained her, Tony, and I—" He gulped. "Do you think maybe *you* can find her for us?"

Tony glanced from one to the other. "I'll try. I think maybe I can. I don't know how, but I've been up against disappearances before. You guys go home, or to work, or wherever you usually go, and I'll get in touch with you the moment I hear anything."

He saw them out of the office. Then he crossed the reception room, moved down the hall and entered the inner sanctum. Betty was sitting at his desk, up to her neck in items out of the vast filing case. Tony stretched out on the divan, and kicked off his shoes.

"Give, Beautiful," he said.

Without looking up, she began to talk, reading from her notes.

"Sammy Lewis kept up his search for a duplicate Helen Lane for three years. It became an obsession with him and he neglected the business that was making him rich to follow it. He tried girl after girl, gave them little tests and auditions. He had them made up, photographed. Then one by one he cast them all aside. He finally became desperate. He'd gone nearly broke. And Helen Lane was bigger and more successful than ever."

Tony closed his eyes, concentrating on the set-up—a man desperately trying to duplicate a former success.

Betty's voice went on: "Then apparently, from the stories he handed the press at the time, he found the *ideal* girl. She, too, worked at a barbecue stand. Like Linda Darnell, who was starred young, she was only seventeen. But he *knew* she was the right girl. Her name was Mary Lancaster, but he discarded that and gave her the show name 'Kiki'. No last name. Just Kiki. Like Zorina. He spent all of the money he had left on her.

"He rented costumes and had still photographs made of her wearing them. He persuaded the Max Factor Cosmetic Company to do a beauty series on her—pictures showing the transformation from a demure kid into a glamor attraction. These pictures appeared in drug store windows throughout the coun-

try. He got a display in three of the picture magazines. He sent out endless publicity on her.

"Day after day he worked with her, instructing her how to act, making her walk with a book on her head, teaching her the art and dignity of interviewing a casting director or producer. He put her through a dramatic school, a dancing school, paid for singing instructions, bought her a complete wardrobe. In fact, he bought her everything money can buy in the build-up it takes to get an actress across in Hollywood these days."

"The poor guy!"

"Yeah. He even got her dates to premieres with young contract players, so she'd be seen. And finally he interested a studio enough to get a screen test. She was tested, came out fine. Three other studios tested her in rapid succession. Then the bidding began. It got up to five hundred a week with options—which for a beginner with no experience is absolute tops. But Sammy Lewis apparently knew that in Kiki he had a good thing and he was holding off. He signed no contracts as of today."

"I heard about that from George Wood," Tony said.

"So for his pains," Betty concluded, "he was murdered. The thing we have to do, of course, is find Kiki. She's the key and the answer."

Tony sat up, rubbing his stockinged toes. "She may be the answer, but here's the pay-off. Kiki is missing!"

"What?"

"Yeah. A guy murdered, and his protege missing. Nice messes we walk into! Wood's had private cops looking for her. Those guys are pretty thorough—so apparently she hasn't been home or in any of her usual places." He paused. "Hand me those portraits of Kiki I see you've got there on the desk. Maybe they'll tell us something."

She handed them to him, and Tony sorted them through very carefully. He studied each picture two or three times.

"Kiki was probably going to walk out on him," Betty suggested. "In an argument over his holding out on the studios. He lost his temper; there was a fight. She bumped him and lammed."

"Nuts," Tony said. He looked up. *"How,* anyway? All the doors and windows were locked from *inside."* He looked at the pictures. "Hey—this Kiki looks *exactly like Helen Lane!"*

"That was the idea, I guess—to carbon-copy his first discovery as closely as possible."

"But hell, this is identical! Coiffure, the way she makes up her lips and smiles; her clothes, hips—"

"You notice the damnedest things," Betty said.

"Contour of her face, ways of smiling, dramatic studies and poses. Say, could this be Helen Lane?"

"No. It's Kiki, all right."

"But—" Tony set his feet on the floor, and fumbled with his shoes. "Get your scarf over your pretty blonde head, baby! We're going to trot over to Paramet and have a look at one of Helen Lane's films—and directly afterward gander at a copy of Kiki's screen test. I've a faint but exquisite notion ticking like a time-bomb in the back of my head."

"Okay." She slipped on the scarf. "By the way, about that mumbo-jumbo I was trying to do with the windows at Sammy's apartment. It was my idea that if the wind caught them they'd bang closed. And it was the kind of lock that would snap when that happened."

"You mean somebody could have crawled out the window and we still might have found the room sealed up from the inside?" he said. "Even so, what does it prove? It was *still* two stories up—no fire escape or anything—and *ten* stories down. Human flies are not very common."

"Okay," she said, "so I'm a dope." Then: "Listen, you go on over to Paramet by yourself. I'll scurry around and pick up some more information—and meet you there."

IV

TONY KEY sat alone in the dinky projection room. He sat in the very rear, with rows of empty seats in front of him. He was operating the volume control, turning the sound from the amplifiers behind the screen up or down at will. By pressing a button he could signal to have the film re-run, stopped in its frame, or whatever he desired. There was both an inter-studio and a regular telephone at his side. A Helen Lane dramatic sequence flashed from the screen.

Betty Gale entered the tiny theater now, slamming the heavy metal door behind her. Tony turned down the volume, so that the screen dialogue died out, while the picture action continued. Betty sat down beside him. She had changed into a blue skirt, red cord sandals, and a red jersey sweater.

"I found out Helen Lane's attending the premiere of her new picture tonight. It's at the Chinese—a big affair. You'll have to hurry if you want to see her before she arrives."

"I could have told you that much," Tony said.

"Her favorite spot is the Pali," Betty went on. "It's one of the more exclusive spots on the Sunset Strip. She'll probably stop there for dinner, or a drink before she leaves for the theater."

"Yeah, I've heard of it."

Tony glanced at Betty, then nodded toward the woman on the screen. "You don't think *she* killed Sammy Lewis, do you? Anyone as pretty as that?"

"Why not?" Betty snapped. "When are you ever going to quit running after women!"

"When they stop running," Tony said quietly. "Did you get Kiki's home address? I mean by that, the place she originally came from. They *all* come from somewhere."

"Yeah. It's a small town in Montana. Her mother and father are dead. An uncle was taking care of her before she ran away and came to Hollywood. After that Sammy Lewis changed her name from Mary Lancaster to Kiki and transformed her into an utterly new personality. Nobody knew what had happened to Mary Lancaster. The folks back home had no way of knowing she was Kiki, and they figured she just disappeared."

"And now she *has* disappeared?"

"Yeah. I just talked to Curly and Sonny. There's no trace of her yet."

"Fine! A kid named Kiki whom all the studios are bidding for is missing!"

The feature picture starring Helen Lane went off now, and a screen test marked *Test 3*—"Kiki"—came on. Tony watched intently, turning up the sound-box volume. Kiki appeared on the screen, and Tony gasped.

"I'd *swear* it was Helen Lane!"

"It isn't, though," Betty assured him. "I discovered from the studio that Helen was in the mountains when this test was made. A director and another guy were with her."

Tony watched a moment longer. "Why, every single movement is the same! The way she walks—her dramatic tricks, her stance—even the way she turns, even her laughter. And look! Now she's crying in the same way!"

"Watch her kiss," Betty said. "She'll kiss in the same way, too. Sammy Lewis had her aping Helen right to the letter."

"Yes, but they even *look* alike!" said Tony.

"Ain't grease paint and coiffure wonderful?" Betty said. "Notice, though. There's a slight difference in the sound of their voices."

"Only a shade in tone," Tony replied. "The speaking emphasis, the rise and fall of the words is the same." He signaled to have the film shut off.

"What now?" Betty asked.

"I'm going to call up Montana," Tony said. "It may take a few minutes. Then I believe we'll intercept Miss Lane at the premiere. I think I've got the beginning of what may be called an idea. In any case, I'll

want to ask her a few questions."

He picked up the telephone. "Long Distance," he said.

Betty looked over at him. "Is the idea you have the same as you had a little while ago? Or a different one?"

"The same," he said . . .

There were huge arc lights in front of the Chinese Theater.

They swung back and forth, lighting the sky. Several hundred people crowded around, craning their necks, but the police kept them clear of the curb. Chauffeured cars swept up, and disgorged stars, writers, directors and producers in evening wraps, silk scarfs, black Homburgs. They strode up to the foyer of the theater through the roped-off aisle, declining first here and then there to sign autograph books.

A huge red Lincoln stopped, the door was opened, and a beautiful girl, wearing an ermine cape and hood, stepped out and hurried up the aisle. A murmur of voices rippled electrically through the crowd. "That's Helen Lane! It is! Can't you see?" and "Miss Lane, will you sign my book?"

But the star moved quickly past, her head lowered. Because of the huge crowd, the usual broadcast of the opening was being conducted from within the lobby.

A rickety, broken-down taxicab with a *Police Pass Sticker* in its windshield swerved abruptly up to the curb. The door opened and Tony Key and Betty Gale emerged. They hurried up the aisle before anyone could stop them. But a few feet from the lobby a huge ticket-taker spotted them, and instantly blocked the way.

"Have you tickets?" he said.

Tony shook his head. "No, we were—"

"You can't get in without tickets," the man said. "The studio gives them out. You can't *buy* any, you know," he added quickly, giving Tony an aggrieved look.

"Listen," Tony said, agitated. "I'm Tony Key! I—"

"Sure," said the ticket-taker, "and I'm Clark Gable!" He gave Tony a shove. "Go on, beat it before I have the cops throw you out!"

Suddenly, through the loudspeakers, the announcer was telling the crowd and the television audience that the star of the production would say a word to them. Tony stood still and listened. The loudspeaker buzzed. The star was apparently begging off. But suddenly she seemed to change her mind.

"Hello, everybody," a voice of box-office gold said. "I'm *thrilled* to be here tonight. *Really* thrilled." That was all.

Tony stared at Betty. "It—it sounds like her," Betty said.

"Like Helen Lane, you

mean?" He paused. "But not enough. Hell, *that's* Kiki! It was Kiki who—" He grabbed Betty by the hand. "Come on, my luscious and lovely blonde. We're going to find Miss Helen Lane."

They hurried back toward the curb. "And everybody but us," he added, "thinks she's here at the Chinese. If they noticed any change in her voice, they probably imagined she had a cold, and never gave it a second thought."

A limousine standing at the curb had just let out a party of four. The door was still open and Tony steered Betty into the back seat. He climbed in himself, and slammed the door shut. The amazed chauffeur turned around.

"You haven't anything but time to kill till the show's over," Tony said. "Drive us to Malibu. Number Sixteen Plum Tree Avenue. There's—twenty bucks in it for you."

"Sure, said the driver. For all Tony or Betty knew, the car belonged to Lana Turner or Grace Kelly.

They made a left turn on La-Brea, and were roaring down Sunset past the Club Pali, when Betty finally burst out: "But *I* told you she usually hung out in the Pali! Why don't we just peek in and—"

"Don't be a creep all your life," Tony said. "She wouldn't appear in public if she's got a stand-in taking her place at the Chinese. Hell, she wouldn't even be at her home. Simply deduction, sweetie lamb. She's got a cozy little hideout she sometimes spends week-ends in at Malibu. It's a natural place for her to go—because at this time of year the beach is deserted. And I figured that out all by myself," he added with a grin.

"Bravo," Betty said dismally.

V

THERE WAS ONLY a single light in the window at the Malibu cottage. Tony told the chauffeur to wait, and he and Betty climbed the steps to the porch. Tony tried the front door, and found it unlocked. He walked in, Betty at his heels. A young woman sat in the small living room comfortably reading a book, her legs drawn under her. She looked up, startled.

"Hello, Helen Lane," Tony said.

"Tony Key! Why—"

"I guess you didn't think anybody'd be looking for you down here, did you?" Tony said. "You figured we'd all think you were at the Chinese, just as you were supposed to be.

Helen Lane simply stared. She was small, and she wore blue-silk lounging pajamas, and rope beach sandals. Betty smiled at her, nodding toward Tony.

"Don't mind him," she said.

"He's Operator Thirteen. He always gets his woman."

But Tony was a little grim. "Give, darling," he said to Helen. "I guess you know why I'm here. Just why did you get another actress to stand in for you at the premiere?"

Helen's liquid eyes switched from Betty to Tony. "I—I was so upset about Sammy Lewis' death that I—well, I couldn't go through with it, that's all. I asked the studio to let me out of it, and they were furious. You know how those things are. It was *my* picture. But I simply couldn't go tonight, and I—"

"You got Kiki to take your place?"

"How did you know who she was?"

"I know all about her," Tony said. "I think I have the whole set-up now. I'm waiting for your version, though." He stared at her for an instant, then added quietly: "Before any arrests are made."

"*Arrests?* I thought Sammy committed suicide."

"The papers had it that way. But it was murder. You *knew* that, didn't you?"

"I—I suspected it," she said miserably. "Listen, Tony. I'll tell you everything I know, and if you don't want to believe me, it's all right. I think I perhaps had a better motive to kill Sammy than anyone else in Hollywood. Maybe you can understand now why I'm in such a state of nerves that I couldn't go to the opening tonight."

Tony lit a cigarette.

"It was like this," Helen Lane said. "Five years ago I was just beginning. Sammy Lewis and I were engaged to be married. Just before the wedding I discovered he had a wife. I discovered it quite by chance—a letter of his addressed to 'Mrs. Lewis.' I knew his mother was dead, and I questioned him. We—we quarreled rather violently.

"His wife lived in the East. She refused to give him a divorce, and he sent her the miserly sum of twenty dollars a week—which was her sole support. He had hoped to keep her out of the way and to marry me, anyway, deliberately committing bigamy. The part which I was unable to forgive was that he had told me *nothing* about it! I was flattered that he loved me enough to want to become a bigamist, but he hadn't loved me enough to *tell me!*

"A thing of that sort could have ruined my career, of course. As it was, it broke my heart. I believe I was completely disillusioned. I suddenly saw over to the other side of the fence—that poor woman, somewhere in the East, living miserably. He had once loved *her* enough to marry her, too. Now he was cold and heartless. He spoke of her in the ugliest terms.

"Sammy implored me to say nothing of his other wife, and it was on this agreement that he consented to sell out his agent's rights in my contract to another agent. We broke up, and I never saw him again."

"But—"

"You know the rest," Helen Lane said. "It became his obsession to find a duplicate of me. As I rose to stardom there was about me, naturally, a certain glamor that burned in his eyes brighter than the sun. He devoted his life to finding my exact double. He must have interviewed a thousand girls during those years, and a few he even tested.

"Finally—though I didn't know it then—he found the right one. She looked so much like me that he was startled. She even talked like me. I suppose, eventually, if you searched the world, you could find a duplicate for anyone. He took this girl to his office. He taught her all of the secrets of charm he had taught me. He saw to it that she used the perfume I always wear—walked, talked, danced, acted, wore her hair the same way.

"Toward the last, as this girl Kiki began getting more publicity, I was away. First in the East for a play, then in the mountains. When I returned she had already been tested. Several studios wanted her. I saw one of those tests. Naturally, I recognized Kiki as my kid sister."

"Your sister!"

"Yes. The last time I'd seen her was on a trip home to Montana. She'd been only thirteen then—and she was intensely jealous of me, the way girls that age can sometimes be. They either idolize or hate you. There's no in-between. Well, Mary never wrote me. Finally, I heard that she was with my uncle, growing up, and doing fine.

"Actually, she was burning her heart out to come to Hollywood. She wanted to do the same things I had done. But she was too proud—especially after she'd treated me so shabbily—ever to seek me out. When she was seventeen, she ran away and came here. She got a job in a barbecue stand because she knew that was where I had started.

"It was inevitable that she should meet Sammy Lewis, who was then still on his search for a carbon copy of me. He saw in this scrawny, seventeen-year-old kid the qualities—whatever they are—that I'd had. He learned at once that she was my sister. It was Sammy himself who had shortened my name from Lancaster to Lane. He and Kiki entered into a pact. He promised her that without saying a word to me he would make her famous."

"And so he almost did?"

"Yes—except for one thing. She thought he was going to

make her a star in her own right. Instead he deliberately made her my double. He was in for bigger game. The studio has made considerable money on my pictures. I've been lucky. Put it that way. But for years the other studios have tried to invent duplicate Helen Lanes—and they've all failed. My own studio has spent thousands in publicity. It would naturally be to their advantage to keep another really authentic Lane off the screen. It's the old case of one famous star in a family being enough."

"I get it," Tony said. "He was getting his revenge on you for breaking off with him, and at the same time trying to hijack the studio into paying him a flat sum to keep Kiki *off* the screen!"

"Exactly! The other studios were offering as high as five hundred a week for her. But *my* studio had come up to seventy-five thousand dollars. They were willing to pay Sammy Lewis that much in cash if he kept her contract-free. This meant *they* would put her under contract, and bury her, let her drop out of public sight."

"And he wouldn't take seventy-five G's?"

"No. He was holding out for more. He was rather nasty with them. He had the whip hand and he knew it."

"In that case," Tony said, "the studio would have paid up to seventy-five grand, and anything under it, to have Mr. Lewis bumped off!"

"I suppose so. But about that time I arrived back in town. I found out about what was going on and got in touch with Kiki. We had a reunion. When I told her how Sammy meant to cheat her she was furious. I had her move up to my house—and kept her out of sight.

"She was terribly grateful to me. She told me she'd be happy just to be my double and stand-in around the studio. She'd realized too that she was in love with another man, and hoped to marry him. I coached her, and let her go to the premiere tonight for me. That was today—after I found out Sammy was dead."

"Cinderella—on the night of a murder," Tony whispered. "So I guess the kid'll be your double now, until she gets married. This is one of those Hollywood stories you seldom ever hear about. By the way, who is it Kiki hopes to marry some day?"

Helen smiled ruefully. "You will laugh. But Kiki's still a kid in a lot of ways. The man she thinks she wants to marry is Happy Holtz."

"What?"

The star nodded.

Betty had already started for the door, and now Tony followed her.

"Where are you going?" Helen called.

"For a ride in the cool night air," Tony said.

THE PURPLE NEON sign was was going on and off: *Happy Holtz—Builder of Beautiful Bodies.*

On the top floor, Tony faced the physical director. "So you discovered Sammy Lewis didn't intend to make Kiki a star at all. You discovered he meant to use her to blackmail Helen Lane's studio. He had double-crossed her—after you had spent weeks teaching her everything you knew, building her up! You were in love with Kiki and hadn't pressed Sammy for the two thousand he owed you. But this was too much!

"You went straight to Sammy. You told him he couldn't do that. You lost your temper. You were going to mop up with him. He pulled a gun—"

Happy Holtz said: "Go on, Tony."

His two husky assistants hovered in the background, listening to every word Tony said. Betty Gale glanced at them nervously. There was a gun in Tony's hand now. He was watching the muscles draw together in Holtz's face.

"He pulled a gun, Holtz, and you leaped on him, like the big cat that you are. In the scuffle you shot him three times through the stomach. The noise aroused the neighbors and you heard them in the hall. So you opened the windows, jumped up, caught hold of a drainpipe, and descended hand over hand to the roof.

"I said that was a trick *nobody* could do. But I forgot about Superman Holtz. You and Tarzan. That solves the riddle of the locked doors."

"You can't prove it," Holtz said quietly.

"Your fingerprints on the drainpipe will be proof enough," Tony said. "We're also having the gun checked, and the room gone over. It's established that you and Kiki were in love."

"Look out!" screamed Betty.

Holtz plunged forward. He came on like lightning.

Tony didn't fire. He intercepted Holtz. There were three different kinds of sound as the lightning fizzled out. Holtz had landed with an awful crash. Tony turned, still holding the gun.

"I learned a little jiu jitsu once just for the hell of it," he said. "You don't need strength if your timing is okay." His jaw tightened. "Just keep sitting there where you are, Holtz, till I get the cops. One move and I'll blow your head off."

Tony kept the gun on Happy Holtz. Betty Gale looked at him and sighed.

"Fine stuff, Pop. Don't look now, but I think I'm proud of you."

a case for lord peter wimsey

by . . . Dorothy L. Sayers

The police feared the murder suspects had all been elsewhere. But to Peter Wimsey "elsewhere" was the oval in a hangman's noose.

LORD PETER WIMSEY sat with Chief-Inspector Parker of the C.I.D. and Inspector Henley of the Baldock Police in the library at The Lilacs.

"So you see," said Parker, "that all the obvious suspects were elsewhere at the time."

"What do you mean by 'elsewhere'?" demanded Wimsey, peevishly. Parker had hauled him down to Wapley on the Great North Road without his breakfast, and his temper had suffered. "Do you mean that they couldn't have reached the scene of the murder without traveling at over one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second? Because, if you don't mean that, they weren't absolutely elsewhere. They were only relatively and apparently elsewhere.

"For Heaven's sake, don't go all Eddington. Humanly speaking, they were elsewhere, and if we're going to nail one of them we shall have to do it without going into their Fitzgerald contractions and coefficients of spherical curvature. I think, Inspector, we had better have

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Dorothy Sayers did not have to travel from some remote corner of England or Wales to enroll at a famous seat of learning. She was born amidst the cloistered gray walls and gleaming spires of Oxford itself. And though she turned first to teaching after leaving Somerville College she must have known from the first that Lord Peter Wimsey would someday expect her to put him into a book. Could so dazzling a sleuth be wholly *fictional? Frankly, we doubt it!*

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them in one by one, so that I can hear all their stories again. You can check them up if they depart from their original statements at any point. Let's take the butler first."

The inspector put his head out into the hall and said: "Hamworthy."

The butler was a man of middle-age, whose spherical curvature was certainly worthy of consideration. His large face was pale and puffy, and he looked unwell. However, he embarked on his story without hesitation.

"I have been in the late Mr. Grimbold's service for twenty years, gentlemen, and have always found him a good master. He was a strict gentleman, but very just. I know he was considered very hard in business matters, but I suppose he had to be that. He was a bachelor, but he brought up his two nephews, Mr. Harcourt and Mr. Neville, and was very good to them. In his private life I should call him a kind and considerate man. His profession? Yes, I suppose you would call him a moneylender.

"About the events of last night, sir, yes. I shut up the house at seven-thirty as usual. Everything was done exactly to time, sir—Mr. Grimbold was very regular in his habits. I locked all the windows on the ground floor, as was customary during the winter months. I am quite sure I didn't miss anything out. They all have burglar-proof bolts and I should have noticed if they had been out of order. I also locked and bolted the front door and put up the chain."

"How about the conservatory door?"

"That, sir, is a Yale lock. I tried it, and saw that it was shut. No, I didn't fasten the catch. It was always left that way, sir, in case Mr. Grimbold had business which kept him in town late, so that he could get in without disturbing the household."

"But he had no business in town last night?"

"No, sir, but it was always left that way. Nobody could get in without the key, and Mr. Grimbold had that on his ring."

"Is there no other key in existence?"

"I believe—" the butler coughed—"I believe, sir, though I do not know, that there is *one*, sir—in the possession of—of a lady, sir, who is at present in Paris."

"I see. Mr. Grimbold was about sixty years old, I believe. Just so. What is the name of this lady?"

"Mrs. Winter, sir. She lives at Wapley, but since her husband died last month, sir, I understand she has been residing abroad."

"I see. Better make a note of that, Inspector. Now, how about

the upper rooms and the back door?"

"The upper room windows were all fastened in the same way, sir, except Mr. Grimbold's bedroom and the cook's room and mine, sir; but they couldn't be reached without a ladder, and the ladder is locked up in the tool-shed."

"That's all right," said Inspector Henley. "We went into that last night. The shed was locked and, what's more, there were unbroken cobwebs between the ladder and the wall."

"I went through all the rooms at half-past seven, sir, and there was nothing out of order."

"You may take it from me," said the inspector again, "that there was no interference with any of the locks. Carry on, Hamworthy."

"Yes, sir. While I was seeing to the house, Mr. Grimbold came down into the library for his glass of sherry. At seven forty-five the soup was served and I called Mr. Grimbold to dinner. He sat at the end of the table as usual, facing the serving-hatch."

"With his back to the library door," said Parker, making a mark on a rough plan of the rooms, which lay before him. "Was that door shut?"

"Oh, yes, sir. All the doors and windows were shut."

"It looks like an extremely draughty room," said Wimsey. "Two doors and a serving-hatch and two French windows."

"Yes, my lord; but they are all very well-fitting, and the curtains were drawn."

Wimsey moved across to the connecting door and opened it. "Yes," he said, "good and heavy, and it moves in sinister silence. I like these thick carpets, but the pattern's a bit fierce." He shut the door noiselessly and returned to his seat.

"Mr. Grimbold would take about five minutes over his soup, sir. When he had done, I removed it and put on the fish. I did not have to leave the room; everything comes through the serving-hatch. The wine—that is, the Chablis—was already on the table. That course was only a small portion of turbot, and would take Mr. Grimbold about five minutes again. I removed that, and put on the roast pheasant. I was just about to serve Mr. Grimbold with the vegetables, when the telephone-bell rang. Mr. Grimbold said: 'You'd better see who it is. I'll help myself.' It was not the cook's business, of course, to answer the telephone."

"Are there no other servants?"

"Only the woman who comes in to clean during the day, sir. I went out to the instrument, shutting the door behind me."

"Was that this telephone or the one in the hall?"

"The one in the hall, sir. I

always used that one, unless I happened to be actually in the library at the time. The call was from Mr. Neville Grimbold in town, sir. He and Mr. Harcourt have a flat in Jermyn Street. Mr. Neville spoke, and I recognized his voice. He said: 'Is that you, Hamworthy? Wait a moment. Mr. Harcourt wants you.' He put the receiver down and then Mr. Harcourt came on. He said: 'Hamworthy, I want to run down tonight to see my uncle, if he's at home.' I said: 'Yes, sir, I'll tell him.' The young gentlemen often come down for a night or two.

"We keep their bedrooms ready for them. Mr. Harcourt said he would be starting at once and expected to get down by about half-past nine. While he was speaking I heard the big grandfather-clock up in their flat chime the quarters and strike eight, and immediately after, our own hall-clock struck, and then I heard the Exchange say, 'Three minutes.' So the call must have come through at three minutes to eight, sir."

"Then there's no doubt about the time. That's a comfort. What next, Hamworthy?"

"Mr. Harcourt asked for another three minutes and said: 'Mr. Neville has got something to say,' and then Mr. Neville came back to the phone. He said he was going to Scotland shortly, and wanted me to send up a country suit and some stockings and shirts that he had left down here. He wanted the suit sent to the cleaner's first, and there were various other instructions, so that he asked for another three minutes. That would be at eight-three, sir, yes. And about a minute after that, while he was still speaking, the front-door bell rang.

"I couldn't very well leave the phone, so the caller had to wait, and at five past eight he rang the bell again. I was just going to ask Mr. Neville to excuse me, when I saw Cook come out of the kitchen and go through the hall to the front door. Mr. Neville asked me to repeat his instructions, and then the Exchange interrupted us again, so he rang off, and when I turned round I saw Cook just closing the library door. I went to meet her, and she said: 'Here's that Mr. Payne again, wanting Mr. Grimbold. I've put him in the library, but I don't like the looks of him.' So I said: 'All right; I'll fix him,' and Cook went back to the kitchen."

"One moment," said Parker. "Who's Mr. Payne?"

"He's one of Mr. Grimbold's clients, sir. He lives about five minutes away, across the fields, and he's been here before, making trouble. I think he owes Mr. Grimbold money, sir, and wanted more time to pay."

"He's here, waiting in the hall," added Henley.

"Oh?" said Wimsey. "The unshaven party with the scowl and the ash-plant, and the blood-stained coat?"

"That's him, my lord," said the butler. "Well, sir"—he turned to Parker again—"I started to go along to the library, when it came over me sudden like that I'd never taken in the claret and Mr. Grimbold would be getting very annoyed. So I went back to my pantry—you see where that is, sir—and fetched it from where it was warming before the fire. I had a little hunt then for the salver, sir, till I found I had put down my evening paper on top of it, but I wasn't more than a minute, sir, before I got back into the dining room.

"And then, sir"—the butler's voice faltered—"then I saw Mr. Grimbold fallen forward on the table, sir, all across his plate, like. I thought he must have been took ill, and I hurried up to him and found—I found he was dead, sir, with a dreadful wound in his back."

"No weapon anywhere?"

"Not that I could see, sir. There was a terrible lot of blood. It made me feel shockingly faint, sir, and for a minute I didn't hardly know what to do. As soon as I could think of anything, I rushed over to the serving-hatch and called Cook. She came hurrying in and let out an awful scream when she saw the master. Then I remembered Mr. Payne and opened the library door. He was sitting there, and he began at once, asking how long he'd have to wait. So I said: 'Here's an awful thing! Mr. Grimbold has been murdered!' and he pushed past me into the dining room, and the first thing he said was: 'How about those windows?'

"He pulled back the curtain of the one nearest the library, and there was the window standing open. 'This is the way he went,' he said, and started to rush out. I said, 'No, you don't'—thinking he meant to get away, and I hung on to him. He called me a lot of names, and then he said: 'Look here, my man, be reasonable. The fellow's getting away all this time. We must have a look for him.' So I said, 'Not unless I go with you,' and he said, 'All right.' So I told Cook not to touch anything, but to ring up the police, and Mr. Payne and I went out after I'd washed the poor master's blood off my hands and fetched my torch from the pantry."

"Did Payne go with you while you did all that?"

"Yes, sir. Well, him and me went out and we searched about in the garden, but we couldn't see any footprints or anything, because it's an asphalt path all round the house and down to

the gate. And we couldn't see any weapon, either. So then he said: 'We'd better go back and get the car and search the roads.' But I said: 'No, he'll be away by then,' because it's only a quarter of a mile from our gate to the Great North Road, and it would take us five or ten minutes before we could start. So Mr. Payne said: 'Perhaps you're right,' and came back to the house with me. I did not have to urge him.

"Well, then, sir, the constable came from Wapley, and after a bit the inspector here and Dr. Crofts from Baldock, and they made a search and asked a lot of questions, which I answered to the best of my ability, and I can't tell you no more, sir."

"Did you notice," asked Parker, "whether Mr. Payne had any stains of blood about him?"

"No, sir—I can't say that he had. When I first saw him, he was sitting in here, right under the light, and I think I should have seen it if there was anything, sir."

"Of course, you've searched this room, Inspector, for bloodstains or a weapon or for anything such as gloves or a cloth, or anything that might have been used to protect the murderer from bloodstains?"

"Yes, Mr. Parker. We searched very carefully."

"Could anybody have come downstairs while you were in the dining room with Mr. Grimbold?"

"Well, sir, I suppose they might. But they'd have to have got into the house before half-past seven, sir, and hidden themselves somewhere. Still, there's no doubt it might have happened that way. They could not come down by the back stairs, of course, because they'd have had to pass the kitchen, and Cook would have heard them, the passage being flagged, sir, but the front stairs—well, I don't know hardly what to say about that."

"That's how the man got in, depend upon it," said Parker. "Don't look so distressed, Hamworthy. You can't be expected to search all the cupboards in the house every evening for concealed criminals. Now I think I had better see the two nephews. I suppose they and their uncle got on together all right?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Never had a word of any sort. It's been a great blow to them, sir. They were terribly upset when Mr. Grimbold was ill in the summer—"

"He was ill, was he?"

"Yes, sir, with his heart, last July. He took a very bad turn, sir, and we had to send for Mr. Neville. But he pulled round wonderfully, sir—only he never seemed to be quite such a cheerful gentleman afterwards. I think it made him feel he wasn't

getting younger, sir. But I'm sure nobody ever thought he'd be cut off like this."

"How is his money left?" asked Parker.

"Well, sir, that I don't know. I believe it would be divided between the two gentlemen, sir—not but what they have plenty of their own. But Mr. Harcourt would be able to tell you. He's the executor."

"Very well, we'll ask him. Are the brothers on good terms?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. Most devoted. Mr. Neville would do anything for Mr. Harcourt—and Mr. Harcourt for him, I'm sure. A very pleasant pair of gentlemen. You couldn't ask for nicer."

"Thanks, Hamworthy. That will do for the moment, unless anybody else has anything to ask?"

"How much of the pheasant was eaten, Hamworthy?" asked Wimsey.

"Well, my lord, not a great deal of it—I mean, nothing like all of what Mr. Grimbold had on his plate. But he'd ate some of it. It might have taken three or four minutes or so to eat what he had, my lord, judging by what I helped him to. It couldn't have been longer than that."

"There was nothing to suggest that he had been interrupted, for example, by somebody coming to the windows, or of his having got up to let the person in?"

"Nothing at all, my lord, that I could see."

"The chair was pushed in close to the table when I saw him," put in the inspector, "and his napkin was on his knees and the knife and fork lying just under his hands, as though he had dropped them when the blow came. I understand that the body was not disturbed."

"No, sir. I never moved it—except, of course, to make sure that he was dead. But I never felt any doubt of that when I saw that dreadful wound in his back. I just lifted his head and let it fall forward again, same as before."

"All right, then, Hamworthy. Ask Mr. Harcourt to come in."

Mr. Harcourt Grimbold was a brisk-looking man of about thirty-five. He explained that he was a stockbroker and his brother Neville an official in the Ministry of Public Welfare, and that they had been brought up by their uncle from the ages of eleven and ten respectively. He was aware that his uncle had had many business enemies, but for his own part he had received nothing from him but kindness.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you much about this terrible business, as I didn't get here till nine forty-five last night, when, of course, it was all over."

"That was a little later than you hoped to be here?"

"Just a little. My tail-lamp went out between Welwyn Garden City and Welwyn, and I was stopped by a police officer. I went to a garage in Welwyn, where they found that the lead had come loose. They put it right, and that delayed me for a few minutes more."

"It's about forty miles from here to London?"

"Just over. In the ordinary way, at that time of night, I should estimate an hour and a quarter from door to door. I'm not a speed-merchant."

"Did you drive yourself?"

"Yes. I have a chauffeur, but I don't always bring him down here with me."

"When did you leave London?"

"About eight-twenty, I should think. Neville went round to the garage and fetched the car as soon as he'd finished telephoning, while I put my toothbrush and so on in my bag."

"You didn't hear about the death of your uncle before you left?"

"No. They didn't think of ringing me up, I gather, till after I had started. The police tried to get Neville later on, but he'd gone round to the club, or something. I phoned him myself after I got here, and he came down this morning."

"Well, now, Mr. Grimbold, can you tell us anything about your late uncle's affairs?"

"You mean his will? Who profits, and that kind of thing? Well, I do, for one, and Neville, for another. And Mrs. — Have you heard of a Mrs. Winter?"

"Something, yes."

"Well, she does, for a third. And then, of course, old Hamworthy gets a nice little nest-egg, and the cook gets something, and there is a legacy of five hundred pounds to the clerk at my uncle's London office. But the bulk of it goes to us and to Mrs. Winter. I know what you're going to ask—how much is it? I haven't the faintest idea, but I know it must be something pretty considerable. The old man never let on to a soul how much he really was worth, and we never bothered about it. I'm turning over a good bit, and Neville's salary is a heavy burden on a long-suffering public, so we only had a mild, academic kind of interest in the question."

"Do you suppose Hamworthy knew he was down for a legacy?"

"Oh, yes—there was no secret about that. He was to get one hundred pounds and a life-interest in two hundred pounds a year, provided, of course, he was still in my uncle's service when he—my uncle, I mean—died."

"And he wasn't under notice, or anything?"

"N-no. No. Not more than

usual. My uncle gave everybody notice about once a month to keep them up to the mark. But it never came to anything. He was like the Queen of Hearts in 'Alice'—he never executed nobody, you know."

"I see. We'd better ask Hamworthy about that, though. Now, this Mrs. Winter. Do you know anything about her?"

"Oh, yes. She's a nice woman. Of course, she was Uncle William's mistress for a good many years, but her husband was practically potty with drink, and you could scarcely blame her. I wired her this morning and here's her reply."

He handed Parker a telegram, dispatched from Paris, which read: *"Terribly shocked and grieved. Returning immediately. Love and sympathy.* LUCY."

"You are on friendly terms with her, then?"

"Good Lord, yes. Why not? We were always damned sorry for her. Uncle William would have taken her away with him somewhere, only she wouldn't leave Winter. In fact, I think they had practically settled that they were to get married now that Winter has had the grace to peg out. She's only about thirty-eight, and it's time she had some sort of break in life, poor thing!"

"So, in spite of the money, she hadn't really very much to gain by your uncle's death?"

"Not a thing. Unless, of course, she wanted to marry somebody younger, and was afraid of losing the cash. But I believe she was honestly fond of the old boy. Anyhow, she couldn't have done the murder, because she's in Paris."

"H'm!" said Parker. "I suppose she is. We'd better make sure, though. I'll ring through to the Yard and have her looked out for at the ports. Is this phone through to the Exchange?"

"Yes," said the inspector. "It doesn't have to go through the hall phone. They're connected in parallel."

"All right. Well, I don't think we need trouble you further, at the moment, Mr. Grimbold. I'll put my call through, and after that we'll send for the next witness . . . Give me Whitehall twelve twelve, please . . . I suppose the time of Mr. Harcourt's call from town has been checked, Inspector?"

"Yes, Mr. Parker. It was put in at seven fifty-seven and renewed at eight o'clock and eight-three. Quite an expensive little item. And we've also checked up on the constable who spoke to him about his lights and the garage that put them right for him. He got into Welwyn at nine-five and left again about about nine-fifteen. The number of the car is right, too."

"Well, he's out of it in any case, but it's just as well to check

all we can . . . Hello! Is that Scotland Yard? Put me through to Chief-Inspector Hardy. Chief-Inspector Parker speaking."

As soon as he had finished with his call, Parker sent for Neville Grimbold. He was rather like his brother, only a little slimmer and a little more suave in speech, as befitted a civil servant. He had nothing to add, except to confirm his brother's story and to explain that he had gone to a cinema from eight-twenty to about ten o'clock, and then on to his club, so that he had heard nothing about the tragedy till later in the evening.

The cook was the next witness. She had a great deal to say, but nothing very convincing to tell. She had not happened to see Hamworthy go to the pantry for the claret, otherwise she confirmed his story. She scouted the idea that somebody had been concealed in one of the upper rooms, because the daily woman, Mrs. Crabbe, had been in the house till nearly dinner-time, putting camphor-bags in all the wardrobes; and, anyhow, she had no doubt but what "that Payne" had stabbed Mr. Grimbold—"a nasty, murdering beast." After which it only remained to interview the murderous Mr. Payne.

Mr. Payne was almost aggressively frank. He had been treated very harshly by Mr. Grimbold. What with exorbitant usury and accumulated interest added to the principal he had already paid back about five times the original loan, and now Mr. Grimbold had refused him any more time to pay and had announced his intention of foreclosing on the security, namely, Mr. Payne's house and land.

It was all the more brutal because Mr. Payne had every prospect of being able to pay off the entire debt in six months' time, owing to some sort of interest or share in something or other which was confidently expected to turn up trumps. In his opinion, old Grimbold had refused to renew on purpose, so as to prevent him from paying—what *he* wanted was the property. Grimbold's death was the saving of the situation, because it would postpone settlement till after the confidently-expected trumps had turned up.

Mr. Payne would have murdered old Grimbold with pleasure, but he hadn't done so, and, in any case, he wasn't the sort of man to stab anybody in the back, though if the moneylender had been a younger man, he, Payne, would have been happy to break all his bones for him. There it was, and they could take it or leave it. If that old fool, Hamworthy, hadn't got in his way, he'd have laid hands on the murderer all right—if

Hamworthy was a fool, which he doubted.

Blood? Yes, there was blood on his coat. He had got that in struggling with Hamworthy at the window. Hamworthy's hands had been all over blood when he made his appearance in the library. No doubt he had got it from the corpse. He, Payne, had taken care not to change his clothes, because, if he had done so, somebody would have tried to make out that he was hiding something.

Actually, he had not been home, or asked to go home, since the murder. Mr. Payne added that he objected strongly to the attitude taken up by the local police, who had treated him with undisguised hostility. To which Inspector Henley replied that Mr. Payne was quite mistaken.

"Mr. Payne," said Lord Peter, "will you tell me one thing? When you heard the commotion in the dining room, and the cook screaming, and so on, why didn't you go in at once to find out what was the matter?"

"Why?" retorted Mr. Payne. "Because I never heard anything of the sort, that's why. The first thing I knew about it was seeing the butler-fellow standing there in the doorway, waving his bloody hands about and gibbering."

"Ah!" said Wimsey. "I thought it was a good, solid door. Shall we ask the lady to go in and scream for us now, with the dining room window open?"

The inspector departed on this errand, while the rest of the company waited anxiously to count the screams. Nothing happened, however, till Henley put his head in and asked, "What about it?"

"Nothing," said Parker.

"It's a well-built house," said Wimsey. "I suppose any sound coming through the window would be muffled by the conservatory. Well, Mr. Payne, if you didn't hear the screams it's not surprising that you didn't hear the murderer. Are those all your witnesses, Charles? Because I've got to get back to London to see a man about a dog. But I'll leave you two suggestions, with my blessing.

"One is, that you should look for a car which was parked within a quarter of a mile of this house last night between seven-thirty and eight-fifteen; the second is, that you should all come and sit in the dining room tonight, with the doors and windows shut, and watch the French windows. I'll give Mr. Parker a ring about eight. Oh, you might lend me the key of the conservatory door. I've got a theory about it."

The Chief-Inspector handed over the key, and his lordship departed . . .

The party assembled in the dining room was in no very

companionable mood. In fact, all the conversation was supplied by the police, who kept up a chatty exchange of fishing reminiscences, while Mr. Payne glowered, the two Grimbolds smoked cigarette after cigarette, and the cook and butler balanced themselves nervously on the extreme edges of their chairs. It was a relief when the telephone-bell rang.

Parker glanced at his watch as he got up to answer it. "Seven fifty-seven," he observed, and saw the butler pass his handkerchief over his twitching lips. "Keep your eye on the windows." He went out into the hall.

"Hello!" he said.

"Is that Chief-Inspector Parker?" asked a voice he knew well. "This is Lord Peter Wimsey's man speaking from his lordship's rooms in London. Would you hold the line a moment? His lordship wishes to speak to you."

Parker heard the receiver set down and lifted again. Then Wimsey's voice came through: "Hello, old man? Have you found that car yet?"

"We've heard of *a* car," replied the Chief-Inspector, cautiously, "at a Road House on the Great North Road, about five minutes' walk from the house."

"Was the number TBJ twenty-eight?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I thought it might be. It was hired from a London garage at five o'clock yesterday afternoon and brought back just before ten. Have you traced Mrs. Winter?"

"Yes, I think so. She landed from the Calais boat this evening. So apparently she's okay."

"I thought she might be. Now, listen. Do you know that Harcourt Grimbold's affairs are in a bit of a mess? He nearly had a crisis last July, but somebody came to his rescue—possibly Uncle, don't you think? All rather fishy, my informant saith. And I'm told, very confidentially, that he's got badly caught over the Biggars-Whitlow crash. But of course he'll have no difficulty in raising money now, on the strength of Uncle's will. But I imagine the July business gave Uncle William a jolt. I expect—"

He was interrupted by a little burst of tinkling music, followed by the eight silvery strokes of a bell.

"Hear that? Recognize it? That's the big French clock in my sitting room. What? All right, Exchange, give me another three minutes. Bunter wants to speak to you again."

The receiver rattled, and the servant's suave voice took up the tale.

"His lordship asks me to ask you, sir, to ring off at once and go straight into the dining room."

Parker obeyed. As he entered the room, he got an instantaneous impression of six people sitting as he had left them, in an expectant semi-circle, their eyes strained towards the French windows. Then the library door opened noiselessly and Lord Peter Wimsey walked in.

"Good God!" exclaimed Parker, involuntarily. "How did you get here?" The six heads jerked round suddenly.

"On the back of the light waves," said Wimsey, smoothing back his hair. "I have traveled eighty miles to be with you, at one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second."

"It was rather obvious, really," said Wimsey, when they had secured Harcourt Grimbold (who fought desperately), and his brother Neville (who collapsed and had to be revived with brandy). "It had to be those two; they were so very much elsewhere—almost absolutely elsewhere. The murder could only have been committed between seven-thirty and eight-six, and there had to be a reason for that prolonged phone-call about something that Harcourt could very well have explained when he came. And the murderer had to be in the library before seven fifty-seven, or he would have been seen in the hall—unless Grimbold had let him in by the French window, which didn't appear likely.

"Here's how it was worked. Harcourt set off from town in a hired car about six o'clock, driving himself. He parked the car at the Road House, giving some explanation. I suppose he wasn't known there?"

"No; it's quite a new place; only opened last month."

"Ah! Then he walked the last quarter-mile on foot, arriving here at seven forty-five. It was dark, and he probably wore goloshes, so as not to make a noise coming up the path. He let himself into the conservatory with a duplicate key."

"How did he get that?"

"Pinched Uncle William's key off his ring last July, when the old boy was ill. It was probably the shock of hearing that his dear nephew was in trouble that caused the illness. Harcourt was here at the time—you remember it was only Neville that had to be 'sent for'—and I suppose Uncle paid up then, on conditions. But I doubt if he'd have done as much again—especially as he was thinking of getting married.

"And I expect, too, Harcourt thought that Uncle might easily alter his will after marriage. He might even have founded a family, and what would poor Harcourt do then? From every point of view, it was better that Uncle should depart this life. So

the duplicate key was cut and the plot thought out, and Brother Neville, who would 'do anything for Mr. Harcourt,' was roped in to help. I'm inclined to think that Harcourt must have done something rather worse than merely lose money, and Neville may have troubles of his own. But where was I?"

"Coming in at the conservatory door."

"Oh, yes—that's the way I came tonight. He'd take cover in the garden and would know when Uncle William went into the dining room, because he'd see the library light go out. Remember, he knew the household. He came in, in the dark, locking the outer door after him, and waited by the telephone till Neville's call came through from London. When the bell stopped ringing, he lifted the receiver in the library.

"As soon as Neville had spoken his little piece, Harcourt chipped in. Nobody could hear him through these sound-proof doors, and Hamworthy couldn't possibly tell that his voice wasn't coming from London. In fact, it *was* coming from London, because, as the phones are connected in parallel, it could only come by way of the Exchange. At eight o'clock the grandfather-clock in Jermyn Street struck—further proof that the London line was open. The minute Harcourt heard that, he called on Neville to speak again, and hung up under cover of the rattle of Neville's receiver.

"Then Neville detained Hamworthy with a lot of rot about a suit, while Harcourt walked into the dining room, stabbed his uncle, and departed by the window. He had five good minutes in which to hurry back to his car and drive off—and Hamworthy and Payne actually gave him a few minutes more by suspecting and hampering one another."

"Why didn't he go back through the library and conservatory?"

"He hoped everybody would think that the murderer had come in by the window. In the meantime, Neville left London at eight-twenty in Harcourt's car, carefully drawing the attention of a policeman and a garage man to the license number as he passed through Welwyn. At an appointed place outside Welwyn he met Harcourt, primed him with his little story about tail-lights, and changed cars with him. Neville returned to town with the hired 'bus; Harcourt came back here with his own car. But I'm afraid you'll have a little difficulty in finding the weapon and the duplicate key and Harcourt's blood-stained gloves and coat. Neville probably took them back, and they may be anywhere. There's a good big river in London."

accident report

by . . . Michael Avallone

A knife or a loaded gun may not be the simplest weapon to use in a slaying — if the need for a cover-up is urgent.

THEY GOT ME this morning, Chief. At nine o'clock on Fulton Street and Chester Square. I was crossing the street on the green light but that didn't stop them. You can't have forgotten how that nice young kid Welles was done in. Right in his bathtub. Remember?

Do you want to know how they got me, Chief? With a taxicab. Believe it or not—a red, open-top taxicab. I didn't figure on their being so daring about it. I never thought they'd pull something like that in broad daylight with everyone looking on and at the height of the rush hour.

I never even knew what hit me until later.

I had to get my report in. This thing is too big, too important to wait. We can't take the chance. We've got to stop them before they sew up the whole works. But don't worry, Chief. We will.

Listen, I was leaving Barry's office when it happened. He had just given me enough dope to put all of them in the pen for a thousand years. The data is

An accident report as tense and gripping as this one is seldom handed in by the victim himself. But its unusual qualities should not have surprised us, for one of Michael Avallone's very famous Ed Noon detective novels sold well over a million copies. And that could only happen to a born storyteller!

air-tight, Chief. Open and shut. Once the papers are in your hands, their whole setup is blooey.

I think I know who fingered me. Coming out of the lobby of the Eagle, I bumped into a nice, old gentleman. You know—one of those men of distinction types. He spent all of a minute making apologies. From where I sat, he could have avoided the collision easy just by stepping around me.

He's about six feet tall, between fifty and fifty-five, and has a marked foreign accent and a saber scar on his left cheek. Probably a disguise of personality. You know how these guys operate.

Barry talked plenty. Of course, my forty-five helped a lot. I never would have flashed the thing if he hadn't caught me housecleaning in his office. I had to rough him up a bit to loosen his tongue. Funny thing, I enjoyed it. I know he's one of the guys that had poor Welles done in. Besides, this cat-and-mouse diplomacy the Pentagon boys force us into—mincing words with the goons—was always too much for me. I needed the exercise.

Barry—he squeals too. Like they all do when someone else is applying the pressure. It goes with their makeup.

After I got what I wanted from the rat, I beat it. I was smart enough not to take the elevator. I used the emergency stairway. But I never figured on the nice, old guy in the entrance. That's the way it goes. I was clear up until then.

Anyway, here's the dope. It's really plain as the nose on Durante's face but I guess that's why nobody can see it. It's too big and right under your eyes.

Those oil contracts at United Products are contracts all right. But not for oil. Know what's in those cargoes they ship out past the Statue of Liberty? METAL XPX. You guessed right, Chief, that day this Spring when we went to see the President. We needed the proof then and we need it now. You don't have to do any guessing about that.

It knocked me over when I first got wind of it. Right here in the good, old U. S. A. our own people are helping them.

Get them, Chief. All of those big businessmen who care only for the buck and the hell with the country.

I wish I could have made it to Headquarters before they got me with that damn cab. Now, I don't know what to do. Another ship sails tonight with more of the big-noise stuff. Chief, you've got to stop them. The boat is docked at Pier Forty, a tramp steamer called the *Gem of Genoa.* It sails at midnight.

Stop that sailing, Chief, if you have to do it by blowing the ship out of the harbor. Use a

long-range gun—anything. Only in the name of humanity, don't let them leave.

Well, that's all, Chief. That's the full report but—there's one thing more.

No matter what the medical report says, don't let them kid you. It wasn't any traffic accident.

For as surely as if they used a loaded gun, they killed me this morning. Ran me down like a dog on the highway. With a red, open-top taxicab. And it was on the corner of Fulton Street and Chester Square.

We think THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *is a natural. Certainly there is no more beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than The Saint. Certainly there is no man more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a detective magazine than Leslie Charteris. Most of his adult life he's been a fantastically successful spinner of mystery stories and a keen student of crime fiction.*

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PLEASE PRINT SD 66

the cream in his coffee

by . . . Ferdinand Reyher

Even a hair-maker's dummy may learn how to dislike a killer before the milkman rings twice.

It was Pinky's love of cream in coffee which really gave him the idea of holding up the milkman. Whenever he expected to be home, or had got in ahead of the milkman, he used to leave a note in a bottle outside his door.

"Milkman—one small extra heavy cream—Rogers—4C."

One Tuesday when the milkman was collecting, Pinky gave him a twenty dollar bill to change. Say, that bird could just as easily have changed ten twenties. Pinky let a couple of Tuesdays ride in order to case the chalk peddler's route, because he had seen more than one guy win a ticket bungling a little job. So he found out that the milkman's route ended at the apartment house on the corner, and that the old German woman who left there each morning at a quarter to nine with a small black suitcase, worked in a wig shop downtown, and didn't return till six-thirty.

One Tuesday Pinky let the milkman ring his bell without answering it. After the milk-

It takes a rare storytelling gift to transform a murder mystery told in the third person into what seems to be an actual confession of guilt penned by the criminal himself. But Ferdinand Reyher has achieved that miracle here, so that we actually hear the wicked soliloquizing and the whistling-in-the-dark bravado of a wholly vicious character putting a noose around his neck.

Copyright, 1939, by Ferdinand Reyher

man had done it the second time, this time on the way down, Pinky stood with his ear to his door listening to him go down the stairs, the empty milk bottles clinking in his wire tray. Then he waited just thirty minutes more. This ought to bring him to the house next to the corner. He tucked his gun under his left arm, patted his coat flat over it, and let himself out.

Silverstein came out of his delicatessen shop next door just as Pinky reached the stoop. Pinky stopped and talked to him for a minute, because in a flash he saw how to use even this. That's the way he was, a little fellow but a quick thinker who never missed a trick. A southbound bus came on.

"Here's my new Olds! So long!" Pinky sang out, and flashed across the street, and hopped the vehicle at the corner.

As easy as that he let himself out of the neighborhood in front of a solid witness.

He rode a dozen blocks, and took another bus back. He spotted the milk wagon still standing in front of the apartment house beside the corner, and got off at the next stop. He swung around at just the right gait to be just anybody, and walked in the side entrance of the corner apartments without even a hint of slowing down. The dump was a walk-up like his own, and just taking a breath at the bottom to spot anyone that might be on the stairs, he ran up to the old woman's landing, slipping on a pair of cotton gloves on the way.

He had the old woman's door open in a pair of winks, and himself inside, with the chain on, and his ear to the crack listening, and catching his breath. The layout was three rooms, kitchen and bath. A little stuffy living-room, a little crowded bedroom, and between them a small dark room nearly all taken up by a big table. This table was laid all over with coils, braids, tufts and switches of hair, and wooden blocks the size of heads, covered with wigs; besides a lot of scissors, pins, combs, brushes, meshing and thread.

Hardly a light came into the joint, because it ran along a blind alley. He remained motionless for a minute, letting his eyes get used to the dimness.

He took off his coat and hat and dropped them on the bed, along with the gun. From the closet he took one of the old woman's dresses and slipped it on. He tied an apron around it so that his right arm could pass under it. Then he fitted a gray wig on his head, and stuck on a pair of spectacles. Pinky looked into a mirror. Say, he didn't know himself.

He moved a chair out into the hall beside the door, and sat down to wait and listen for the water boy. He knew the old

woman didn't trade with him, so he wouldn't buzz her bell.

He sat for a little while with his ears straining for the tinkle of empties in the milkman's rack, but by and by he began to grow restless. He wanted a cigarette, but he couldn't see himself smoking in that get-up.

The apartment was dead still. It was a kind of dead stuffy stillness, as though no window had been opened in it for years. Not even a clock ticked. That old woman didn't need a clock.

After a while he raised his nose and sniffed. There was some kind of funny smell that bothered him. He tried to place it. All of a sudden he did, and the back of his neck began to itch. It was the smell of dead hair.

He got up and went to the door of the wig room and looked in. Pinky saw things much clearer now, and some things he hadn't even noticed before. Standing out from everything else on the table was a swell silver wig, set on a black block. It was drawn down at the sides and curved back in a knot, so that what showed of the block was a black surface about the size of a girl's face.

There was something queer about it, a kind of aliveness, and he couldn't get his eyes off it. Then he began to think he could make out a nose, a mouth, and the rest of a face under the hair, which was set on just a little crooked, giving it a kind of wise look, as if it knew something. But what made it look wiser than anything else was a pencil! A pencil stuck into the knot at the back.

Pinky could almost see two dead white arms float up and stick that pencil in there.

He backed into the hall, and took a few turns up and down. Once when he came to the door of the wig room he stopped short. He had an idea the silver wig had moved. He blinked at it, and went back to his chair, and sat down again to wait and listen.

But he couldn't get his mind off that thin smell of dead hair, and those wigged block heads at his back gave him the creeps. He got up again and did some more time up and down the corridor. Before he knew it he was standing in the doorway looking at the silver wig.

The way the light hit it seemed to touch out an eye in the face for a minute, and then it went out again. It was just like a slow wink. He had to fight to break away from where he was standing.

As he stepped into the hall he nearly broke his neck, tripping in the old woman's skirt. He let out a curse and grabbed the knob and swung the door shut, tight. He was sweating. Maybe it was doing a job alone

made a guy sweat. He never had done a job alone before.

He was just about ready to go out and look for the milkman, only he didn't want to take the chance. It was things like that queered the sloppy guys. But a minute later he caught himself doing a funny thing. He stuck his ear to the door of the wig room and listened. For what? His scalp lifted under his wig.

For a minute he thought he'd heard the clink of empty milk bottles in there! He started to take a deep breath and stopped in the middle of it. He did hear it! There it was again!

Empty milk bottles were clanking inside there! He shied off—and stopped dead again. No, the sound was coming through the hall. He had it spotted right now. The milkman was coming up the stairs!

By the time Pinky reached the door he was himself again. He shoved his gun fist under the apron and listened to the milkman coming closer, step by step, the empties clinking clearer and clearer in his tray. He was almost at the top. One more step —Pinky flung the door open, almost in the milkman's face. The milkman stopped, and stared at him.

"There you are, milkman!" said Pinky, in a take-off of the old woman's voice. "Give me now two bottles milk."

The milkman started briskly taking them out of his tray, from among the empty ones.

"You put them down in the kitchen, please," said Pinky in his assumed voice. "I hurt my arm."

The milkman looked at the apron where it covered Pinky's arm, and seemed to hesitate. Pinky gripped the gun tighter. But without a word the milkman went past him, back to the kitchen, and set the bottles on the table. Then he turned, and stepped back so hard he nearly knocked the bottles right off again, for this time he was looking into Pinky's gun.

"Put that tray down," Pinky said, still in what he thought was the old woman's voice. Only now his business tones came through, "and put up your hands —quick! All the way!"

He turned the milkman around, and keeping the gun against his back, he went through all his pockets spilling everything he came across on the table. Then he sat him down, and tied him to a chair with a clothesline. He tied the chair to the washtub, and then he gagged him.

Pinky worked fast, but he didn't miss a trick. He lifted all the coin out of the milkman's route book and his wallet, and his whole pile of change. But he left him his nickel-plated watch and everything else that was no

use to him. It was a bigger haul than Pinky had expected. Fewer people than usual must have promised to pay next week.

He shut the kitchen door on him and went back to the bedroom. He took off the glasses, wig, apron and dress, slipped his gun back under his arm and put on his own coat and hat. Very deliberately he put everything back the way it was. There was nothing like being neat to make sure you weren't overlooking some little thing.

But he didn't put the wig back where he got it. Just the thought of going back into that room gave him the creeps again. He chucked the wig over on the old woman's bed, and stepped into the hall. The next minute he pulled up short.

The wig-room door, which he had positively closed, stood open. There wasn't a hatful of breeze in the flat, but there it stood open. He looked in, and —he could have put his hand on the Book—the silver head nodded at him!

Pinky inched by the door—and just then a notion hit him. He gaped at the head all over again, as if it had put the notion into his own head, and all of a sudden, he smacked his leg and broke out into a muffled laugh, as if this notion hit him as the funniest notion that ever hit any guy.

He felt right at home with the old silver wig now. They were pals. He stepped up and pulled the pencil out of the bag now. Right beside it lay a pad, just as if that was what old silver dome had been trying to make him see all along. He laughed softly, but all over. He had to hold himself in from busting out into a regular belly laugh.

He moved over to a clear spot at the end of the table, and carefully began writing something on the pad in big funny letters, because he had the same weird notion about the old woman's handwriting that he had about her voice.

It was only a short little note Pinky wrote. A short little note to the milkman. Because the wonderful notion, the beautiful wonderful notion of writing a note to the milkman was a natural one. For when you had made up a note to the milkman see, and left it in a bottle outside a door, that was just the one door in the whole world nobody would ever think of trying, in order to locate a missing milkman.

"Milkman—" wrote Pinky, in this take-off of the old woman's handwriting, "—one small extra heavy cream."

Pinky suddenly got a flash of the old woman's face, coming home and finding that note in a bottle outside her door. He doubled up, weak from laughing he couldn't let out. Why, the

milkman would never even be located before the old woman herself got back, Pinky nearly got the cramps over this wonderful chance of holding up a whole world hunting for a milkman. And that old woman's face when she came home and—"

The laugh on his own face froze. He stood there, the blood draining out of him, not daring to breathe, watching something out of the corner of his eye that made ice of his legs, while his hand jerked on automatically over the pad. For the silver-wigged thing had turned to face him, and it was moving toward him!

The pad and pencil dropped out of his fingers, and he threw out his hands to ward it off, and the *thing* on the table rocked and trembled toward him! He ducked and raised his arm.

It lurched at him!

A choked noise broke out of his throat, and he turned in a leap, and out of the corner of his eye he saw it leap off the table after him.

He charged at the hall door, and tore it open.

Something tugged at his arm, and he nearly screamed, and dived down the stairs, not even shutting the door, and he a careful worker who never missed a trick. Halfway down the last flight Pinky sagged against the wall, panting, and sweat started running off his face. He bucked himself up, and straightened his clothes. His fingers caught on something hanging from a button on his right sleeve. It was a long piece of black thread, with a couple of silver hairs twisted around the end.

It must have caught on his button when he took the pencil out of the silver wig. When he moved his arm he had moved the wig and the block because he was tied to it. It was as easy as that! And for all the coin collected by all the milkmen in all the city all the day, Pinky Rogers wouldn't have stepped into that wig-woman's apartment again.

Pinky hopped a taxi and an hour later he was sitting in on the stud poker game down at Callahan's. He played all night, and by morning he was on top of the world with a couple yards more to the good.

It was nearly noon when Pinky came home. He had hunted all through the afternoon papers of the day before, and all that morning's, but there wasn't a line on the milkman in one of them. It was an insult to him one minute, and a compliment the next.

He came up his stairs, whistling, and carrying a little bottle of thick cream he had just bought in Silverstein's. Still whistling he let himself into his hideaway. Just from habit he fastened the chain on his door, and walked back to the kitchen.

Pinky took one step into his kitchen, and the next minute he was plastered flat against the wall with his hands pushing themselves up in the air, while the cream for his coffee fell with a bang at his feet. He stared petrified into the eyes of a big dick, who was jamming a snub-nosed pistol into the pit of his stomach. A second later Pinky's shaking wrists were in the bracelets.

"Say!" Pinky exploded then. "What's the idea? Huh, what's this all about?"

The dick grinned, and handed Pinky a little piece of paper. Pinky looked down at it. He held it closer in his locked hands. He stared at it pop-eyed, and his jaw dropped, believing and yet not able to believe.

"Milkman—one small extra heavy cream." Pinky read, in his take-off of the wig woman's handwriting, which nobody in the world could have tied on him. But in his own handwriting, his own handwriting so sure that there was no getting away from it in all the world, only it was a little jerkier than usual, there followed:

"Rogers—4C—"

He broke out into a fit of laughing, and dropped in a heap at the big cop's feet.

A convict without a single redeeming trait makes a desperate bid for liberty—and finds that a prison break can be worse than cold poison to a man with a secret, overmastering fear

THE CODE OF THE RAT

By GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

in the next issue

the plainest clue

by . . . Ray Cummings

To Snell murder planned with a clocklike precision could hardly fail to succeed. But clocks have deadly quirks to them sometimes.

JONATHAN WITHERS was angry. "I intend to make certain that Anita doesn't marry you!" he said. In his nicely furnished study, on the top floor of his big country mansion, he leaned back in his chair and stared defiantly at the young man opposite him.

"She's eighteen," Peter Snell said. "How can you—"

"Oh, I can, all right! I'll disinherit you both! You won't be so eager to marry her when she's penniless, will you?"

Snell tried to remain calm, but he could feel his anger rising. It was worse than he had thought!

Peter Snell had only the dubious good fortune—it now seemed distinctly dubious—of being a distant cousin of the rich old Jonathan Withers, a proud old man with an unpredictable temper. Anita was Withers' granddaughter, and his principal heir. Snell knew that under ordinary circumstances he would get nothing but a trivial legacy. Two or three thousand at best. Anita was his only big chance for sudden riches.

Thoughts are swift things. A flood of them now was surging

Ray Cummings' no inconsiderable fame as a science fantasy writer has somewhat obscured his brilliance in the mystery field, just as a very large sun may hide a smaller one of equal—or even surpassing—brightness. But in this small yarn the radiance shines forth notwithstanding, in a masterly job of plotting.

at Snell. He and old Withers were alone here, in a distant wing of the huge old house. Withers had his study with its adjoining bedroom and bath on the third floor because he preferred solitude, and complete assurance that he would remain undisturbed by any possible sounds from downstairs. It was nearly midnight now. Two nephews, another cousin and Anita were downstairs, playing progressive bridge with some guests in the big baronial living room, and the servants were down there too. Snell couldn't hear a sound. . . .

And of course the reverse was true. There was no one to hear what was about to happen in the study. Snell had dismissed the butler, saying that he would bring up Withers' bedtime tea and toast himself. This he had done, and had then stopped in his own bedroom on the second floor, and secured his little revolver, with its silencer. The sound of its report would be only a faint plop.

"You think I don't know what kind of a scoundrel you are, don't you?" Withers was saying. "All my family are nothing but bloodsuckers, waiting for me to die—waiting to see what they're going to get out of me. You're the worst!"

Snell was hardly conscious that he had leaped out of his chair, with the little revolver leveled in his shaking hand. His first shot missed. He was on his feet, firing downwards and so the shot missed the old man's head and thudded against the wall down by the floor.

But the second found its mark! Withers was partly out of his chair, but he crumpled back and slithered over the chair arm, his head dangling gruesomely with the wound in his temple.

For a moment the room swayed around Snell. But the thing was over now. Quickly he regained his wits. He was in no real danger. He had thought this thing out carefully. There was no chance that anyone else would come up here tonight. Withers was always furious if anyone ever disturbed him.

Snell wiped off the handle of the little revolver and dropped it to the floor. He was sure that the weapon could never be traced to him.

He was quite calm when, a moment later, he sauntered downstairs. The bridge party was in full swing and the big clock in the hall was just chiming twelve when Snell appeared.

"You got him to bed okay?" Tom Withers, one of the nephews asked. His grin was sarcastic.

Snell smiled. "Sure, sure. He's all right. Who's winning?"

The game went on. At about twelve thirty it broke up and the guests left.

It was about quarter past one

when Snell smelled the smoke. He was in his bedroom, but he hadn't yet undressed. The house was aroused. It made quite a commotion but there was no need to turn in a fire alarm. It was soon discovered that when the bridge party had broken up, somebody had emptied a big ash-tray into a scrap basket.

A smouldering butt had finally set the contents of the basket into flame. While the commotion was still at its height there was a sudden wild shout from upstairs. Henderson, the butler, frightened at the smoke, had rushed up to the third floor to arouse Withers. He was coming down now, screaming. "He—he's dead. Someone shot him!"

They all rushed up in horrified panic. Then young Tom Withers phoned for the police.

It could easily have been an outside marauder. The police realized that right away. The back stairway led to the third floor, from the rear of the house. Several of the back windows were unlocked, and two of them were found open to the summer night.

Snell chuckled to himself when one policeman mentioned it. It gave him pleasure to realize that he was quite calm, not worried at all. Why should he be?

"It happened some time between midnight and quarter past one," Snell said to police Sergeant Marks, the officer in charge. "I brought him tea and toast. It was just midnight by the hall clock when I came down and joined the party again."

They all remembered that—and Tom Withers confirmed it. They all agreed that they had retired before one o'clock. Between then, and the fire at one-fifteen—if it hadn't been an outside marauder—anyone in the house could have sneaked up to the third floor and done it.

Sergeant Marks nodded when Snell mentioned that aspect of it. He and Snell were at the study door and several of the policemen were inside the study. Suddenly from within the room, one of the policemen called, "Well, I'll be damned! Come take a look, Sarge!"

Marks went into the study. For a minute Snell listened in apprehension to their excited whispering. Marks said, "Yeah. I've heard that it sometimes happens."

They were all over by the television, looking at something. Their backs blocked Snell's view so that he couldn't see what they were talking about. A thrill of fear darted through him. But he told himself firmly that he was perfectly safe. Nobody could possibly prove what time the murder had been committed. They'd have to prove conclusively that the shots were fired at midnight when he'd been up here alone with the old man—and that they couldn't do!

The Sergeant had come back

and he stood grimly confronting Snell. He said abruptly, "Well, seems we got you—you damned murderer! Come take a look!"

Snell's heart leapt wildly. "Just what do you mean? What are you talking about?"

They were all surrounding him, pushing him toward the television. Withers' little electric clock stood there on the top of the cabinet. Its hands marked three minutes of ten. Weird damn thing! The clock was running, and as Snell wonderingly stared, its hands said four minutes of ten!

"Sure! It's running backward!" the Sergeant was saying. "That can happen with some makes of electric clocks—especially the ones that were made before the war! What started it running backward? That's easy. Take a look at the plug down in the base socket!"

The television and the clock were plugged into a base socket in the wall by the floor.

"The first shot missed him," Marks said. "It hit that base socket, and smashed the clock plug. For a split second the current was interrupted. The clock stopped. But the short circuit fused the wires again. The clock started, and it happened to start running backward. A friend of mine had a clock like that open once, and he showed me how and why it sometimes happens. Anyways, there it is!"

"So what?" Snell heard himself gasping, "It's all very interesting, Sergeant, but I don't—"

"It's more than interesting," Marks interposed. "Running backward at the same rate that real time is progressing forward." Marks had his watch in his hand. "Anybody can figure it out. Electric clock says that it's now—five to ten. The real time is two o'clock. Exactly half way between, is the murder time! Which figures two and a half minutes of twelve. That's the time you were up here, Snell! We sure got you!"

Snell heard himself gasping, "Why—why—how could I think of a thing like that!"

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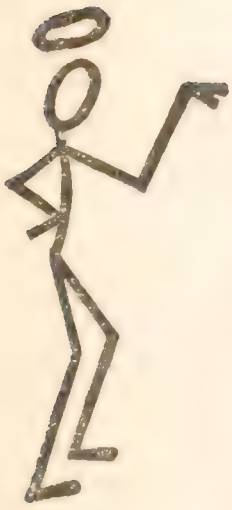

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Please Print SD 66

death of a honey-blonde

by . . . Isaac Asimov

The two girls were not really in the least twin-like. But when a honey-blonde swallows cyanide it's smart to ignore cold facts.

IF YOU THINK it's hard to get hold of potassium cyanide, think again. I stood there with a pound bottle in my hand. Brown glass, a nice clear label saying *Potassium Cyanide CP*—the initial, I was told, meant "chemically pure"—and I stared with a shudder at the small skull and crossbones directly under the lettering.

The fellow who owned the bottle polished his glasses and blinked at me impassively. He was Associate Professor Helmuth Rodney of Carmody University. He was of medium height, stocky, with a soft chin, and plump lips, and he seemed completely indifferent to the fact that I was holding in my hand enough poison to kill a hardy Scotch regiment.

I said, "Do you mean to say this just stands on your shelf day after day, professor?"

He said, in the kind of deliberate tone he probably used in lecturing his students, "Yes, it always has, Inspector — along

There are few circulating libraries where you won't encounter—usually in close proximity to a tempting array of best-selling mystery novels—a shelf devoted exclusively to science fiction. And on that shelf you'll be likely to find not one or two, but a half-dozen Isaac Asimov titles. For Mr. Asimov is one of the really big names in science fiction, and has contributed substantially to its coming of age. And now he has written a superb mystery story for us —his first fictional excursion into crime! We're happy indeed to welcome him as a special guest contributor, and we believe you'll share our delight.

with the rest of the chemicals in alphabetic order."

I glanced incredulously about the cluttered room. Footwide projections lined the upper reaches of all the walls, and bottles, large and small filled every inch of shelf space to capacity.

"This one," I pointed out, "is poison."

"A great many of them are," he said, with infuriating composure.

"Do you *keep track* of what you've got?" I demanded.

"In a general way." He rubbed his chin. "I knew I had that bottle, for instance."

"But suppose someone came in here and just helped himself to a spoonful of this stuff. Would you be able to tell?"

Professor Rodney shook his head. "I couldn't possibly. It would be an unreasonable thing to expect."

"Well, then, who could get into this laboratory? Is it kept locked?"

He frowned slightly. "It's locked when I leave in the evening, unless I forget," he said. "During the day it isn't locked. You see, I'm in and out."

"In other words, professor, anyone could come in here, even someone from the street, walk off with a lethal quantity of cyanide, and no one would ever be the wiser."

"I'm afraid so," he conceded.

"Tell me, professor, why do you keep a full pound of cyanide in the place, anyway? To kill rats?"

"Good heavens, no." He seemed faintly repelled at the thought. "Cyanide is sometimes used in organic reactions to form necessary intermediates, to provide a proper basic medium, to catalyze—"

"I see. I see. Now in what other labs is cyanide available in this way?"

"In most of them," he replied at once. "Even in the student labs. After all, it's a fairly common chemical, routinely used in syntheses."

"I wouldn't call its use today routine," I said.

He sighed and said, "No, I suppose not." His thoughts reverted to the tragedy itself. "They used to call them the 'Library Twins.' "

I nodded. I could understand how the nickname had originated. The two girl librarians were very much alike.

Not close up, of course. One had a small pointed chin on a round face, and the other had a square jaw and a long nose. Still, bend them over a desk and both had honey-blonde hair parted in the middle, with an identical wave. Look them quickly in the face and you would probably notice first their wide-set eyes of about the same shade of blue. See them standing

together at a moderate distance and you could tell instantly they were both of medium height and both, probably, wore the same brand and size of uplift brassiere. Both had trim waists and neat legs. Today they had even dressed similarly. Both had worn blue.

There was no confusing the two now, though. The one with the small chin and round face had swallowed cyanide — and was quite dead.

The similarity was the first thing that struck me when I arrived with my partner Ed Hathaway. The dead girl was slumped in her chair with her eyes wide and staring, one arm dangling straight down. There was a broken tea-cup on the floor beneath her like—like a period under an exclamation point. Her name, it turned out, was Louella-Marie Busch.

The second girl looked like the first one brought back to life. She was white and shaken, and was staring straight ahead and letting the police and their work flow about her without seeming to notice. Her name was Susan Morey. No wonder Professor Rodney had called the two girls the "Library Twins."

The first question I asked was, "Are they related?"

The answer was *no*. Not even second cousins.

I looked about the library. The walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling. They were volumes of research journals, and stacks of textbooks, and monographs bound in leather. At the rear was a special alcove containing recent issues of unbound research periodicals in dull paper covers. From wall to wall were long tables that might have seated a hundred people if they had been fully occupied.

We got the story out of Susan Morey in flat, toneless sentences.

Mrs. Nettler, the old Senior Librarian had taken off for the afternoon and had left the two girls in charge. At two o'clock, or a little after, Louella-Marie retired to the small room behind the library desk. In the small room, in addition to new books that awaited cataloguing, and stacks of periodicals that awaited binding, there stood on a central table a small hot-plate, a small kettle and the fixings for tea.

I said, "Did Louella-Marie prepare the tea every day?"

Susan looked at me out of her blank, blue eyes. "Sometimes Mrs. Nettler did, but usually it was Lou."

When the tea was ready, Louella-Marie emerged with the news and after a few moments, both girls went into the small room.

"*Both* of you?" I asked sharply. "Who took care of the library?"

Susan shrugged as though that were a minor point to worry

about. "We can see out the door," she said. "One of us could have gone out to answer a desk inquiry."

"Did anyone come to the desk?"

"No one," Susan said. "It's inter-session. At that hour hardly anyone's around."

By inter-session she meant, of course, that the spring semester was over and the summer sessions had not yet started. I learned quite a bit about college life just from talking to her.

The rest of the story made me catch my breath. The tea-bags were out of the gently-steaming cups and the sugar had been added. I remember interrupting her at that point. "You both take sugar?"

Susan said slowly, "Yes. But my cup didn't have any?"

"No?"

"She never forgot before," Susan assured me. "She knows I like sugar. I just took a sip or two and I was going to reach for the bowl and tell her when—"

Louella-Marie had given a queer strangled cry, dropped the cup and was dead in a minute.

After that Susan had screamed and eventually someone had sent for the police.

The routine passed smoothly enough. Photographs and fingerprints had been taken, and a careful check had been made of the names and addresses of the men and women in the building. Then they had been sent home. The cause of death was unquestionably cyanide poisoning and the sugar bowl was the obvious villain. Samples were secured for official testing.

There had been six men in the library at the time of the murder. Five students, who looked frightened, confused or sick—depending, I suppose, on their individual temperaments. The sixth was a middle-aged man, an outsider. He talked with a German accent and had no apparent connection with the college at all. He looked frightened, confused and sick—all three.

My side-kick, Hathaway, started leading all six suspects out of the library. The idea was to get them to the Co-educational Lounge and have them stay put till we could question them in detail.

Suddenly one of the students saw Susan and broke away, striding past me without a glance. Susan flew to meet him. "Pete," she exclaimed. "Oh, darling—"

Pete was built like a football player—except that his profile looked as though he had never been within half a mile of the playing field. He was too good-looking for my taste, but then I get jealous easily.

Pete was staring past the girl, his face coming apart at the seams until its prettiness was

drowned in uneasy horror. He said in a hoarse whisper, "How did Lolly come to—"

Susan shook her head. "I don't know. I'd tell you if I could, but I just don't know."

Pete pulled away from her. He never looked at her once, but kept staring over her shoulder. Finally he responded to Hathaway's grip on his elbow and let himself be led away.

I said, "Boy friend?"

Susan tore her eyes from the departing student. She was trembling visibly and I had to repeat the question.

"Is he your boy friend? Just answer yes, or no."

She looked down at her twisting hands. "We've been out on dates," she said.

"How serious?"

She whispered, "Pretty serious."

"Does he know the other girl, too? He called her Lolly?"

Susan refused to look at me. "Well—"

"Let's put it this way," I said. "Did he go out with her?"

"Sometimes."

"Seriously?"

She snapped, "How should I know?"

"Come on, now," I persisted. "Was she jealous of you?"

"And if she was?"

"Someone put the cyanide in the sugar and put the mixture in only one glass," I said. "Suppose Louella-Marie was j e a l o u s enough of you to try to poison you and leave herself a clear field with your friend, Pete. And suppose she took the wrong teacup herself by mistake."

Susan said, "That's crazy. Louella-Marie wouldn't do such a horrible thing."

But her lips were thin, her eyes sparkled and I can tell hate in a voice when I hear it.

I was still wondering how far that would take me when Professor Rodney came into the library. He was the first man I had met on entering the building and my feelings toward him had grown no warmer.

He began by informing me that he had the highest respect for the law. But as the only senior faculty member present it was his duty to take charge.

I said, "I'm in charge now, professor."

He said, "Of the investigation perhaps, Inspector. But it is I who am responsible to the Dean and I propose to fulfill my responsibilities to the letter." His manner became more conciliatory.

"Mrs. Nettler is in my office. She heard the news-bulletin, apparently, and came at once. She is quite agitated, and insists on seeing you."

Mrs. Nettler was in the usual quandary of the average old lady confronted by violence or sudden death in wholly mysterious circumstances. She didn't know

whether to be horrified or fascinated. Horror won out after she looked into the inner office and noticed what was left of the tea-things. The body had been taken away by then, of course.

She sank into a chair and burst into tears. "I had tea here myself," she moaned. "It might have been—"

I said, as quietly and soothingly as I could, "Exactly when did you drink tea here, Mrs. Nettler?"

She turned in her seat, and looked up at me. "Why—why, just after one o'clock, I think it was. I offered Professor Rodney a cup. It was just after one, Professor Rodney, wasn't it?"

A trace of annoyance crossed Rodney's plump face. He turned to me, and said: "I was here for a moment just after lunch to consult a reference. Mrs. Nettler did offer me tea. I was too busy, I'm afraid, to accept or to note the time exactly."

I grunted and turned back to the old lady. "Do you customarily take sugar with your tea, Mrs. Nettler?"

"Yes, sir."

"*Did* you take sugar?"

She nodded and started crying again.

I waited a bit. Then I asked as firmly as I dared, "Did you notice the condition of the sugar-bowl? Think carefully, Mrs. Nettler."

"It was—it was—" Her eyes dilated in sudden consternation. "It was empty and I filled it myself. I used the two-pound box of granulated sugar. I distinctly remember saying to myself that whenever I wanted tea the sugar seemed to be gone and I wished the girls would—"

Possibly it was the mention of the girls in the plural that broke the spell. She started weeping again.

I nodded to Hathaway to lead her away.

Between one and two o'clock, apparently, someone had emptied the sugar-bowl, and had then added just a bit of laced sugar—very lethally laced sugar.

Maybe it was Mrs. Nettler's appearance that made Susan rule-conscious in an exaggerated way, because when Hathaway came back and reached for one of his cigars the girl said, "No smoking in the library, sir."

Hathaway was so surprised he blew the already lighted match out and replaced the cigar in his pocket.

Instantly the girl stepped briskly to one of the long tables and reached for a large volume that lay open upon it.

Hathaway stepped in front of her. "Just what have you in mind, Miss?" he demanded.

Susan looked completely astonished. "I was just going to put this back on the shelves," she told him.

"Why? You seemed very anx-

ious." He looked down at the open page. I was at his side too by then, staring intently over his shoulder.

The book was in German. I can't read German, but I can recognize it when I see it. The printing was small, and there were geometrical figures on the page with lines of letters attached to them at various places. I was pretty sure that the figures were chemical formulas.

I put my finger in the place, closed the book and looked at the back-strap. It read, "Beilstein — Organische Chemie — Band VI—System Nummer 499-608." I opened to the page again. It was 233 and the first words, just to give you an idea were "4'-chlor-4-brom-2-nitrodiphenylather—$C_{12}H_7O_3NClBr$."

Hathaway was busy copying the sixty-four thousand dollar equations.

Professor Rodney was at the table, too, and that of course made four of us all gathered around the book.

The professor said, in a cool voice, as though he were on a lecture platform with a pointer in one hand and a piece of colored chalk in the other, "This is a volume of Beilstein." (He pronounced it Bile-shtine.) "It's a kind of encyclopedia of organic compounds. It lists hundreds of thousands of them."

"Are they all in this book?" demanded Hathaway.

"This book is only one of more than sixty volumes and supplementary volumes. It is a tremendous German work which is years out of date. It is out of date because organic chemistry is progressing at a constantly increasing pace and no original work can fail to be impaired by the interference of politics and war. Even so, there is nothing even faintly approaching its usefulness in English. For all research men in organic chemistry these volumes are an absolute must."

The professor actually patted the book in admiration as he spoke. "Before dealing with any unfamiliar compound," he said, "it is good practice to look it up in Beilstein. It will give you methods of preparation, essential properties, references, and so on. It serves as a starting point. The various compounds are listed according to a logical system which is clear but not obvious—at least to the layman.

"I myself give several lectures in my course on organic syntheses which deal entirely with simplified methods for finding a particular compound somewhere in the sixty volumes."

I don't know how long he might have continued, but I wasn't conducting a murder investigation to learn organic syntheses and it was time to get down to cases. I said, abruptly, "Profes-

sor, I want to speak to you in your laboratory."

I suppose I had some hazy notion that cyanide was customarily kept in a safe—that every ounce of it was accounted for and that people had to sign a register when they wanted some. I thought an established opportunity to secure a deadly quantity illicitly might supply the proof I was seeking. It would be a beginning, anyway.

And there I stood with a pound of it in my hand and the knowledge that anyone could have helped himself for the asking—or without asking.

And the professor was saying thoughtfully, "They used to call them the 'Library Twins.' "

I nodded just as thoughtfully. "So?"

"It simply proves how incredibly superficial is the judgment of most people. There was nothing twin-like about them except an accidental similarity of hair and eyes. Precisely what happened in the library, Insepctor?"

I told him Susan's story briefly and watched him like a hawk.

He shook his head. "I suppose you think the dead girl deliberately planned to murder her friend."

My thoughts weren't for sale at the moment. I said cautiously, "Don't you?"

The professor shook his head. "No. She's incapable of it. Her attitude toward her duties was a pleasant and helpful one. Besides, why should she?"

"There's a heart interest complication," I said. "Peter is his first name."

"Peter van Norden," he said at once. "The young man is a reasonably bright student, but academically he lacks something. It's hard to define."

"Girls look at these things differently, professor," I pointed out. "Librarians were apparently interested in him. Susan may have been the more successful and Louella-Marie may have decided on direct measures."

"And then proceeded to take the wrong cup?"

I said, "People do queer things under tension."

"Not that queer," he said. "One cup was left unsugared—so the murderess wasn't taking chances. Presumably even if she had not carefully memorized which cup was which, she could count on the sweetness to warn her of danger. She could easily have avoided a fatal dose. That much, at least, is self-evident."

I said, dryly, "Both girls usually took sugar. The dead girl was accustomed to sweet tea. In the excitement, the accustomed sweetness simply failed to ring a bell."

"I don't believe it."

"What's the alternative, professor?" I asked, impatiently. "The sugar was laced with cyanide after Mrs. Nettler's tea at

one o'clock. Did Mrs. Nettler do it?"

He looked up sharply. "What possible motive could she have had?"

I shrugged. "She might have been afraid the girls were going to take her job away."

"That's utter nonsense. She's retiring before the fall session begins."

"*You* were there, professor," I said, softly.

To my surprise, he took it in stride. "Motive?" he asked again.

I said, "You're not too old to have been interested in Louella-Marie, professor. Suppose she had threatened to report some word or act of yours to the Dean."

The professor smiled bitterly. "I accept that as a compliment. But how did I manage to make sure the right girl got the cyanide? Why should one cup have remained unsugared. I may have poisoned the sugar but I didn't prepare the tea."

I began to change my mind about Professor Rodney. He hadn't bothered to work up indignation or even to register shock. He had simply pointed out the logical weakness in my line of reasoning and let it go at that. I applauded him for it.

I said, "What do you think happened?"

He said, "The mirror-image—the reverse interpretation. I think the survivor told the truth *inside out*. Suppose it was Louella-Marie who was winning the boy and *Susan* who didn't like it. Suppose it was Susan who for once was preparing the tea and Louella-Marie who was at the front desk in instead of the reverse. In that case, the girl who prepared the tea would have taken the right cup and remained safe. Everything would be logical instead of ridiculously improbable."

That did it. The man had come to the same conclusion I had and so I had to like him after all. I have a habit of feeling amiably disposed toward guys who agree with me. It comes of being Homo sapiens, I guess.

I said, "We've got to prove that beyond reasonable doubt. Just how would you go about it? Bear in mind that I came up here hoping to prove that only one particular person had access to potassium cyanide. Now that's out. Everyone had access."

The professor said, "Check on which girl was really at the desk at two o'clock when the tea was being prepared."

It was obvious to me that the professor read detective stories and had faith in witnesses. I didn't, but I got up anyway.

"All right, professor," I promised. "I'll do that."

The professor rose and said, urgently, "May I be present?"

I considered. "Does it come

under the head of fulfilling your responsibilities to the Dean?"

"In a way. I would like to see a quick, clean end to this."

I said, "Come along then—if you think your presence will help."

Ed Hathaway was waiting for me in the empty library when I came down. He arose quickly and said, "Inspector, I think I've got it."

"Got what?" I demanded:

"I think I know how it happened. I figured it out by deduction."

"Oh?"

He was paying no attention to Professor Rodney. "The cyanide had to be smuggled in," he said earnestly. "But by whom? By the joker in the deck, the outsider, of course. The guy with the accent—whatzisname. It must be here somewhere."

He started scrabbling through a series of cards on which he had filed a surprising amount of information on the presumably-innocent bystanders.

I knew the gent he was referring to, so I said, "All right, never mind the name. What's in a name? Go on." Which shows that I can be as unbright as anyone.

"Okay. This foreigner comes in with the cyanide in a little envelope. He takes the envelope to a page in the German book, that formula-whacky whatzisname with all the volumes—"

The professor and I both nodded, but only the professor smiled.

Hathaway went on. "He was German—and so was the book. He was probably familiar with it. He put the envelope on a prearranged page to correspond with a particular formula that had been picked out in advance. The professor said there was a way to find any formula if you knew how. Isn't that right, professor?"

"That is right," said Rodney, coldly.

"Okay. The librarian knew the formula, so she had no difficulty in finding the page, too. She picks up the cyanide and uses it for the tea. In the excitement she forgets to close the book—"

I said, "Look, Hathaway. Why should that little guy be doing this? What's his excuse for being here? Do we know?"

"He says he's a furrier reading up on moth-repellants and insecticides. Now doesn't that sound phony right off? Did you ever hear of anything so phony?"

"Sure," I said. "Your haywire theory. Look—no one is going to hide an envelope with cyanide in a book. You wouldn't have to find a particular formula or page with an envelope bulging the volume out of shape. Anyone who simply took the book off the shelf would find it automatically falling open to the right page. A hell of a hiding place."

Hathaway began to look foolish.

I drove on, pitilessly. "Besides, cyanide doesn't have to be smuggled in from the outside. They've got tons of it here. They can use it to make snow-slides. Anyone who wants a pound or two can help himself."

"What?" Hathaway gasped.

"Ask the professor. Go on, ask him."

Hathaway's eyes widened. He fumbled in his jacket pocket and drew out an envelope. "Then what do I do with this?"

"What have you got there—your obituary?"

He took out a printed page with German lettering on it and said, "It's the page out of that German volume which—"

Professor Rodney grew suddenly scarlet. "You tore a page out of *Beilstein?* You dared to do that?"

He shrieked the words and—surprised the hell out of me. I wouldn't have thought him capable of shrieking.

Hathaway said, "I thought we could test it for stickum from the Scotch tape, or maybe for a little cyanide that might have leaked out."

"Give it to me," yelled the professor. "You ignorant fool."

He smoothed out the sheet, and examined both sides as if to make sure that none of the print had rubbed off.

"Vandal!" he said, and I'm sure that at the moment he could have cheerfully killed Hathaway and walked pridefully to the electric chair.

Professor Rodney might have been morally certain of Susan's guilt and I might have been in entire agreement with him. Nevertheless, moral certainty cannot be taken before a jury. Some very solid evidence was needed.

So, lacking faith in witnesses, I attacked through the only established weakness of the possibly guilty person.

I brought Susan Morey in to witness the new line of questioning and if my brilliance failed to wear her down, her own nerves might.

From her appearance, I couldn't tell how far that "might" would take us. Susan sat rigidly at her desk, her hands clasped, and eyes cold. The skin around her nostrils was drawn tight.

The little German furrier came in first, looking sick with worry. "I did nothing," he babbled. "Please. I have business to attend to. I am a furrier. How long must I stay?"

Hathaway had his name and vital statistics on file, so I skipped the preliminaries and went directly to the point.

"You came here a little before two o'clock," I said. "Right?"

"Yes. I wanted to do some research on moth-repellants—I needed it for my business."

"I understand. When you came in you went straight to the desk?"

"Yes. I identified myself, and told her what I wanted."

"Told *whom?*" That was the sixty-four thousand dollar question.

The little fellow stared at me in bewilderment. He had brown curly hair and a mouth that fell in, making him look toothless. But that was a deception which was quickly dispelled. When he talked, his small yellow teeth were plainly visible. He said, "I told the girl sitting there."

"That's right," confirmed Susan, tonelessly. "He spoke to me."

Professor Rodney was gazing at her with a look of concentrated detestation. It occurred to me that his reason for wishing to see justice done quickly might be more personal than idealistic. However, that was none of my business.

I said to the little furrier, "Are you sure *this* is the girl?"

He said, "Yes. I told her my name and my business, and she smiled. She told me where to find the books on insecticides. Then, as I was stepping away, another girl came out from the small room in back."

"Good!" I said. "Now here's a photograph of another girl. Tell me, was it the girl at the desk you spoke to, and the girl in the photograph who came out of the back room. Or was it the girl in the photograph you spoke to and the girl at the desk who came out of the back room."

For a long minute, he stared at the girl, and then at the photograph. Then he turned to me. "They are alike," he said.

I swore to myself. The faintest smile had passed over Susan's lips. Looking at her, I was not surprised.

It was inter-session. She must have known that hardly anyone would be in the library, and that few visitors paid much attention to the librarians anyway. They were fixtures like the bookshelves. If any did, the little German would never be able to swear which of the Library Twins he had seen.

I *knew* she was guilty now. But knowing can be only the first step in a long, grim journey.

"Try to remember," I urged. "Think hard. Which one was it?"

He said, like a man anxious to put an end to all questioning, "I spoke to the girl sitting right there at the desk."

"That's right," said Susan, perfectly calm.

My hope in her nerves hit bottom. I said in despair, "Would you swear?"

He replied at once, "No."

"All right. Hathaway, take him away. *Send him home.*"

Professor Rodney leaned over, and touched my elbow. He whis-

pered, "Why did she *smile* at the fellow when he stated his business. Ask her."

I whispered back, "Why not?" But I put the question to her anyway.

Her eyebrows went up the barest fraction of an inch. "I was just being pleasant," she said. "Is there anything wrong with that?"

She was almost enjoying herself, and I felt my anger rising.

The professor shook his head slightly. He whispered to me again, "She's not the type to smile at a troublesome stranger. It had to be Louella-Marie at the desk."

I shrugged. I could see myself bringing that kind of evidence to the Commissioner. I could just picture it.

Four of the students were a blank, and took up little time. They were engaged in research, they knew what books they wanted, and what shelves the books would be on. They had gone straight to the shelves without stopping at the desk. None of them could say whether Susan or Louella-Marie had been at the desk at the time. They had not even looked up from their books —to hear them tell it—before the scream startled them, and brought them back to reality.

The fifth was Peter van Norden. He kept his eyes fixed firmly on his right thumb, which had a badly-bitten nail. He did not even look up at Susan as he was brought in.

I let him sit for a while to soften him up. Finally, I said, "What are you doing here this time of year. I understand it's between sessions."

He muttered, "My qualifying exams are coming up next month. I'm studying. If I pass, I can go on, and get my Ph.D., see?"

I said, "I suppose you stopped at the desk when you came in here."

His reply was inaudible.

I said, "What? Speak up, please."

He said in a low voice which was hardly an improvement. "I—I don't think I stopped at the desk."

"You don't *think* you stopped?"

"I didn't. I'm sure of it."

I said, "Isn't that strange? You were supposed to be good friends of both Susan and Louella-Marie. Didn't you even say hello?"

"I was worried. I had this test in my mind. I had to study, and—"

"So you couldn't even take time out for a simple greeting." I looked at Susan to see how van Norden's testimony was going over with her. I thought she seemed paler, but I couldn't be sure.

I said, "Isn't it true that you

were practically engaged to either Susan or Louella-Marie?"

He looked up with uneasy indignation. "*No!* I'd be in no position to support a wife. I'd have to get my degree first. Who told you I was engaged?"

"I said, *practically* engaged."

"*No!* I had a few dates maybe. So what? What's a date or two?"

I said, smoothly, "Come on, Pete, which one was your girl?"

"I tell you it wasn't like that at all."

He was washing his hands of the whole matter so hard he seemed buried and smothered in an invisible lather.

"How about it?" I asked, turning to Susan. "Did he stop at your desk?"

"He waved as he passed," she said.

"I don't remember," he said sullenly. "Possibly I did. So what?"

"Nothing," I said, wishing Susan joy of her bargain. If she had killed for the sake of this specimen she had done it for nothing. There could be no doubt at all that henceforward he would ignore her.

Susan wasn't stupid. From the look she was giving Peter van Norden I marked him down as a second candidate for cyanide. Assuming that she went free, of course—and it certainly seemed as if she might.

I nodded to Hathaway to take him away. Hathaway got slowly to his feet and said, "Say, do you ever use those books, van Norden?" He pointed to the shelves where the sixty-odd volumes of the organic chemistry encyclopedia stretched from floor to ceiling.

Pete looked over his shoulder and said in honest astonishment, "Sure. I've got to. Is it a crime to look up compounds in Beilst—"

"It's all right," I assured him. "Come on, Ed."

Ed Hathaway scowled at me and led the boy out. He hates letting go of an exploded theory.

It was now about six o'clock and I didn't see that anything more could be done. As it stood, it was Susan's word against—no word. If she had been a female hood with a record we could have sweated out the truth in any one of a dozen ways. But in her case, such a procedure seemed inadvisable.

I turned to the professor to explain how matters stood, but he was staring at Hathaway's cards. You know, fiction writers often refer to a character's hands as shaking with excitement, but it's something you don't often see. Rodney's hand was shaking like the clapper of an old-fashioned alarm clock.

The professor cleared his throat. "Let me ask her something," he pleaded.

I stared at him, then pushed

my chair back. "Go ahead," I said. With our progress blocked at every turn there was nothing to lose.

The professor looked at Susan, putting one of the cards down on the desk blank side up.

He said, shakily, "Miss Morey?" He seemed to be deliberately avoiding the familiarity of her first name.

She stared at him. For a moment she had seemed nervous. But now she was once more in control of herself, and her voice was steady. "Yes, professor?"

The professor said, "Miss Morey, you smiled when the German gentleman told you his business here. Why was that?"

"I told you, Professor Rodney," she said. "I was just being pleasant."

"Perhaps there was something peculiar about *what* he said? Something decidedly amusing?"

"I was just trying to be pleasant," she insisted.

"Perhaps you found his name amusing, Miss Morey?"

"Not particularly," she said, indifferently.

"Well, no one has mentioned his name here. I didn't know it until I happened to look at this card." Then suddenly, tensely, he cried, "What *was* his name, Miss Morey?"

She paused before answering. "I don't remember."

"You *don't?* He gave it to you, didn't he?"

There was an edge to her voice now. "What if he did? After all that's happened you can't expect me to remember some peculiar foreign name the first time it's mentioned."

"It was *foreign,* then? Are you sure?"

She pulled up short, avoiding the trap. "I don't remember," she said. "I think it was a typically German name, but I can't be sure. For all I know it was John Smith."

I had to admit I didn't see the professor's point. I said impatiently, "What are you trying to prove, Professor Rodney?"

"I intend to prove," he said, tightly, "that it was Louella-Marie who was at the desk when the foreign gentleman came in. He announced his name to Louella-Marie and Louella-Marie smiled in consequence. It was Miss Morey who was coming out of the inner office as he turned away. It was Miss Morey who had just finished preparing and poisoning the tea."

"You're basing that on the fact I can't remember a man's name!" Susan flared. "That's ridiculous."

"No, it isn't," said the professor. "If you *had been* the girl at the desk, you would remember his name. It would be *impossible* for you to forget it." He was holding Hathaway's card up now. He said, "The man's first name is Ernest, but his last name

is Beilstein. *His name is Beilstein!"*

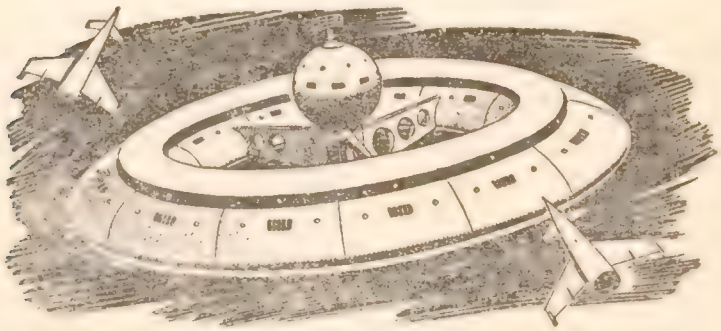
The air went out of Susan as though she had been kicked in the stomach. She turned deathly pale.

The professor went on, intensely. "No chemical librarian could possibly forget the name of anyone who came in and announced himself to be Beilstein. The sixty-volume encyclopedia we've mentioned half a dozen times today is referred to invariably by the name of its editor, Beilstein. The name is like Mother Goose to a chemical librarian, like George Washington, like Christopher Columbus. Actually it is *more* second nature to her than any of them. If this girl claims to have forgotten the name, it is only because she never heard it. And she never heard it because she wasn't at the desk."

I rose and said grimly, "Well, Miss Morey. What about it?"

There was no reply.

She was screaming in earsplitting hysteria. Half an hour later, we had our confession.



If you were thrilled by Isaac Asimov's DEATH OF A HONEY-BLONDE *and like the kind of characterization that plants a time-bomb in the mysterious dark depths of human nature, Algis Budry's brilliant novelette,* THE MECHANICAL MAN, *is just the story you've been waiting for. You'll find it in the current issue of* THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *now on sale. You'll be thrilled too, by the mystery and wonder and strangeness of Jacques Jean Ferrat's* SNOWSTORM ON MARS, *a story about the birth of the first human infant on the red planet. We're sure you'll like the many unusual short stories by such science fantasy greats as Robert Abernathy, Robert Young and Margaret St. Clair.*

burglars must dine

by . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim

Lucy Mott didn't have to do much guessing about crime riddles. Not when her uncle was the illustrious Inspector Wragge of Scotland Yard!

Miss Lucy Mott's first client in the secondary profession which she had so recently adopted made his appearance in sufficiently unusual and alarming fashion.

There was a crash of glass behind her chair, the swinging up of a sash, and a stooping figure sprang lightly into the room. Not only was this unceremonious entrance in itself terrifying—all the more so as Miss Mott's little office was situated on the sixth floor of a block of apartments—but the intruder entered wearing a narrow, black mask over the upper part of his face.

Miss Mott swung round in her chair and gasped in amazement. It was, however, an astonishing but undeniable fact. A burglar, who would appear to have descended from the clouds, had pushed open her window, entered her office and was now crossing the room towards her in haste. Her hand shot out for the telephone.

"Don't touch that, please," the newcomer said.

Miss Mott, new to such ad-

When E. Phillips Oppenheim was five, his nursery must have been made enchanting by Poe-esque "purloined letters" stuck away in odd corners, and a whole regiment of nimble-witted spies dressed as toy soldiers. How else could he have won such fame as a supreme master of exciting intrigue? Now he invites us to join the inimitable Lucy Mott in one of her major adventures.

ventures, made the fatal mistake of hesitating to parley.

"Why not?" she demanded. "How dare you! What do you want?"

She realized then that she had already lost valuable time. She turned once more towards the telephone, but she was too late. There was a grip upon her arm, not exactly painful but exceedingly firm. She was conscious at that moment of only two things. The first was the compelling power of those flashing eyes through the slits of the mask, the second a fragrant perfume of violets.

"A moment, if you please," the newcomer said. "I owe you an explanation. You shall have it. Please leave the telephone alone. You will only cause trouble if you use it."

Miss Mott remained silent, a condition of mental inactivity for which the ease and confidence of the man's tone were alike responsible.

"There's nothing to be alarmed at, I can assure you," he went on. "I am in the same profession as you, only at the other end. Honor among thieves, you know. What a horrid draft! Will you promise me not to use the telephone if I go back and close the window?"

"What do you mean by saying that I am in the same profession as you?" she demanded.

"You're Miss Mott, aren't you?" he said. "Niece of my old friend Superintendent Wragge of Scotland Yard. You have conducted for some years a correspondence column in a woman's magazine entitled 'Home Talks,' and you have been so successful that you have started a little Information Bureau of your own. You see, I know all about you! May I close the window?"

"I shall catch my death of cold if you don't," Miss Mott said.

"Will you promise not to use the telephone?"

"I suppose so," she said grudgingly.

He recrossed the room, looked regretfully at the broken pane and drew the curtain over it. When he returned he was binding a handkerchief around his finger.

"You had better explain what you are doing here," she said. "Honest people don't wear masks during business hours or break through windows. And perhaps you will tell me while you are about it where on earth you came from?"

"May I sit down?" he asked.

She indicated the clients' chair drawn up to the side of her desk. He took it at once, moving it, she noticed, a trifle nearer to the table so that he was within reach of the telephone. He removed his black Homburg hat with a word of apology and placed it on the floor by his side.

"Well," he said, "I came up by the fire escape, if you want to know."

"By the fire escape," she repeated wonderingly.

"And if you want to know more still I have not come far. I have come from the floor below."

"The bridge club?"

He nodded. "Yes, the Hyacinth Bridge Club."

"Have you been stealing things from there?" she asked.

He drew a package which was protruding from his pocket—an oblong parcel securely wrapped up in brown paper.

"Quite right," he said. "I committed a theft. It was not such an easy affair as I had hoped either."

Lucy Mott shrunk a little away from the parcel. Somehow or other it had a sinister appearance. "What is it?" she asked. "I don't like the looks of it."

He patted it with his hand and sighed. "You are quite right," he said. "It is a messy affair, more vicious than any atomic bomb that was ever made. Harmless enough to look at, but a very incriminating weapon to use or to have found in one's possession."

"Then why did you steal it?"

He smiled. "Well, that's another matter. The thing is—I want to get rid of it for a few hours. May I leave it in your charge?"

"Certainly not," Lucy replied coldly. "I am not a receiver of stolen property."

"But this," he pleaded, "is an unusual affair. I can assure you, Miss Mott, that notwithstanding my appearance and actions I am not a criminal. I dabble in irregularities but I also have leanings towards philanthropy. On the present occasion I have stolen this compromising and, I have to admit, dangerous package to save the reputation, perhaps the life, of a very charming and popular lady whose disappearance would be regretted by all of her friends."

Miss Mott looked at him severely. The curious part of the whole affair was that she felt herself inclined to believe him.

"I am still, however," he went on slowly, "only half-way through the job. I need your help to conclude the affair. I do not know whether you have as yet formulated your scale of charges, but if you are not prohibitive I should like, for a suitable fee, to engage you for the rest of the evening."

"What would be the nature of the services you require from me?" Lucy asked gently.

"I should like to ask your permission to leave your office and descend to the elevator as though I had been an ordinary caller," he said. "Furthermore, I should like you to relieve me of this package for the time being,

place it in that brief case," he added, pointing across the room, "take it home with you while you change your clothes, and bring it back to a rendezvous, which we have yet to fix upon, where you will dine with me tonight."

Curiosity grew in Lucy Mott and amazement shone out of her eyes. "I suppose you are real?" she said. "This is not some sort of a dream?" she added hastily.

"I am an actual human being," he assured her, stretching out his hand. "Would you like to feel my fingers to be sure of it?"

"Certainly not," she said. "I have felt them round my arm and I expect I shall have a bruise there tomorrow. You climb through my window wearing a mask, you smash a perfectly good pane of glass to get at the fastening, you confess to have committed a burglary, and you have the impertinence to ask me to take care of the proceeds and dine with you—a perfect stranger—tonight. By the way, what is your name?"

"Ah," he said. "That is a problem."

"Well, you must have one, you know," she said. "You seem to be taking it for granted that I am as eccentric a person as you are. But you can't expect a young woman to dine with a man whose name she doesn't even know."

"My name is Joseph," he said.

"Joseph who?" she asked.

"Joseph of Arimathea, if you like," he answered carelessly.

"So when I arrive at the restaurant where you propose to entertain me tonight," she said, "I am to ask for Mr. Arimathea!"

"You won't need to ask for anyone," he said. "I shall be sitting there waiting for you."

"Wearing that atrocious thing?" she asked, pointing to the mask.

"Not likely," he said. "You will see me as I present myself sometimes. Later, when we are better acquainted, you may discover that my appearance often varies according to my health—and the circumstances."

Lucy sat upright in her chair. "Listen, Mr. Joseph," she said, "we are wasting time. Supposing you tell me what is in that package."

"Something with which you would not like to be found," he said.

"The usual stuff, I suppose? Letters?"

"Nothing of the sort. I cannot at present divulge to anyone the contents of this package. I only want you to keep it for me until this evening. If I could find any way of destroying it here I would do so. There isn't any means, however. I have to rely on you."

"Why not take it away yourself?"

"Because," he explained, "if I have been rightly informed, the elevator does not mount as high as this, and on my way out, therefore, I shall have to pass the door of the Hyacinth Club. If my escapade of this evening has been discovered they might be waiting for me."

"The police?"

"Possibly the police," he admitted, "although sometimes these affairs are not fought out with the police."

"Where exactly did you steal the package from?" she insisted.

"Have you ever been inside the Hyacinth Club?" he enquired.

"Never."

"There is a small room, very much like what we call in golf clubs a locker room, with steel cupboards where members can keep their parcels or some of them even a change of clothes. It is rather a convenience for members living a little way out-of-town. Through influential friends in a different branch of the profession I obtained a master key and stole this packet from one of those lockers."

"How interesting!" Miss Mott exclaimed. "And afterwards?"

"Afterwards I crawled out of the window, risked a short drop on to a small balcony and from there by the fire escape I ascended to your apartment."

"And why was I chosen for this honor?"

"To tell you the truth," he explained, "I had managed to enter the club without being seen by taking the tradesmen's elevator, but I knew that my luck would not hold. Besides, the hall porter is on duty now."

"And did you wear that mask all the time that you were in the club?"

"I put it on when I began to climb the fire escape," he said. "I should be ashamed of it if I were really working professionally. It is old-fashioned. The new cut has long flaps!"

"You seem to me to be very talkative," she said.

"So far," he said, "I seem to have talked too much without having made much progress. What I want you to promise, if you will be so kind, is that in your capacity as a helper of men and women you will slip into an evening gown at eight o'clock—black would suit you very well, I think, with your perfect hair and your perfect complexion—and with the package which I propose to leave with you in a brief case, meet me at some not too well-known restaurant, say Mario's, at half-past eight."

"Thank you," she said. "I never dine out."

"My dear Miss Mott," he said, "is it not true that you

have embarked upon a career of adventure, that you have committed yourself professionally to become the helper of anyone in difficulties?"

"I suppose it is more or less true."

"You are the Miss Mott, the *one* Miss Mott, who advises her clients in all cases of difficulty and who teaches people how to live their lives to the best advantage. It is your ambition to penetrate into every nook and cranny of the world of human beings. I have heard all about you, you see! How can you lead the life adventurous if you refuse to dine with a humble and, you must believe me, not vicious criminal?

"There is much that you still have to learn concerning my profession. I will be your instructor. I will show you how to circumvent the efforts of the more dangerous members of my craft. Besides, I shall probably, by dinner-time, be in a position to satisfy your curiosity regarding the contents of the package."

"You are really going to leave it with me—to trust me with it?" she asked.

"I should trust you with most things in life," he said.

"I think," she said, "that you are mad!"

"And I," he said, "think that you are terribly attractive. That little dash of color—anger, I'm afraid—becomes you, and I wish I could believe that I were the first to tell you that your eyes are marvellous. At half-past eight, then, I shall be waiting for you in the hall of Mario's. Don't be surprised if at first you fail to recognize me. I have many personalities.

"I promise you one thing, however. I will not present myself in the guise of a bespectacled clergyman from somewhere in the northern counties. Nothing so amateurish as that. At half-past eight then!"

He rose to his feet, picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

"I will not be there," she declared positively.

"I shall hope for the best," he said, as, with his back towards her, he removed his mask and disappeared.

About an hour after the departure of her strange visitor, Lucy Mott, carrying a small brief case in which she had cautiously placed the fateful package, descended the two flights of stairs and arrived at the elevator terminus. Her heart gave a little jump as she glanced towards the entrance to the Hyacinth Club.

A police sergeant and a constable were standing on either side of the door and from inside came the sound of voices. The constable as soon as he saw her descend the stairs carrying the brief case, stepped forward. The

sergeant, however, touched him on the arm, whispered a word in his ear and saluted Miss Mott.

She paused at the entrance to the elevator. "Is there anything wrong here, Sergeant?" she asked.

"A little trouble, Miss Mott," he said. "We shall know the exact nature of it later on."

He was obviously disinclined to say more. The elevator boy took her case and Miss Lucy Mott was transported to the ground floor. She stepped into a taxicab and was driven home. The thrill of her afternoon adventure had passed, leaving behind it a dull sort of depression which she could not shake off.

More than once she was inclined to return to her apartment, and hand over her brief case to the sergeant with a full explanation of how she obtained possession of its contents. She had lost her confidence in that debonnair malefactor, and her cheeks burned when she reflected how easily she had fallen victim to his wiles. Nevertheless, she told herself with a certain grim satisfaction, the end was not yet.

Lucy Mott's visitor kept his word to the letter. Even before the swing doors of the restaurant could be opened to receive her he was moving across the little reception lounge with the welcoming smile of a host upon his lips.

She accepted his hand dolefully. "I only came," she said, "because I was curious."

"And you will remain," he said, as they descended the stairs towards the bar, "because you are going to have a delightful dinner."

"What have you been doing to yourself?" she asked, as they took their places at a small table in the bar.

"I just went through the usual routine," he said. "Bath, a light evening shave and a change into decent clothes."

"Don't be stupid," she said. "You look about fifteen years older than I expected to find you, and although you have been frightfully clever about it I don't believe that those lines in your face are natural. Those gray streaks in your hair too make me suspicious."

He laughed softly. Whatever her ideas about her companion might have been Miss Mott was at least obliged to confess that he was a very attractive and distinguished-looking person.

"We semi-criminals," he said, "get into the way of this sort of thing. We are quite accustomed to being blonds one evening and brunets the next. You may yet see me as Santa Claus. How thankful you should be that you are entirely on the right side of the fence. You will never need to disguise yourself.

"On the whole I am glad that you did not wear black, although

I am afraid it was a matter of obstinacy on your part. Gray with your complexion is a perfect color. You are very distracting, Miss Mott."

"I did not come here to listen to nonsense," she said.

"Of course not," he assured her. "We will talk sensibly before long. This has been a strenuous day. We are going to have another cocktail each, and then I will take you to the little corner table upstairs which I have engaged. You shall read the menu of the dinner I have ordered and, after that, when I am quite sure that nothing would induce you to get up and leave me until after it has been served, I shall tell you just as much as I can of what you are dying to hear."

Lucy looked at him reflectively. After all, he did not exaggerate. Hers were very beautiful blue eyes, very beautifully set.

They mounted the stairs a few minutes afterwards and were ushered to their table by bowing waiters, the wine steward, a maitre d'hotel, and the manager.

Miss Mott accepted a cushion for her back, read the menu and gave a sigh of content. She had a weakness for exquisite food.

"You were quite right," she said. "Nothing would induce me to leave until after the strawberries, and as to what you have to tell me about the Hyachinth Club I have perhaps later information even than you."

He looked at her swiftly. "Yes?"

The monosyllable was crisp, interrogative. She continued after a moment's pause. "The whole place was upset when I came downstairs. There were policemen there. Either there had been a robbery which had been discovered or some other tragedy had happened."

"What time did you leave?"

"Seven o'clock."

"How do you know that there were police there?" he asked. "You didn't go inside the club?"

"There was a sergeant and a constable outside. They nearly stopped me when they saw I was carrying a brief case, but fortunately the sergeant happened to know who I was. He interceded and they let me go."

Her companion gave vent to a little exclamation. "Good grief! That was a narrow shave."

"I suppose I am to take it for granted," she said stiffly, "that you left me in the position of being subject to arrest as a receiver of stolen goods?"

"It was one of those situations," he said, "in which someone *had* to take a risk."

"But why should I be forced to take it?" she said indignantly. "Why should I be forced to run the gauntlet of a police inspec-

tion for your sake? You—a perfect stranger."

"Bad luck," he said. "Things turn out that way sometimes. By the by, you brought my property back with you, I suppose?"

"I did not," she said firmly. "Now perhaps you're going to take my dinner away from me. I'm not going to run any further risks by carting about the results of a robbery. I left it at home in my room until you can explain the situation. In case I do not get another course, may I have a piece more toast to finish my caviar with?"

The waiter sprang attentively to the table. Miss Mott was promptly served. Her companion leaned forward and spoke to the maitre d'hotel.

"Send out for the latest edition of the *Evening News* for me, will you?" he said.

The man hurried off with an acquiescent bow.

"What do you want an evening paper for?" asked Miss Mott.

"I thought I should like to see the nature of the trouble at the Hyacinth Club," he said. "It would interest me to know what exactly they believe is stolen and if they have any description of the so-called thief."

"I shall be able to describe him all right," Lucy said.

Her companion sighed. "So you would give me away, would you?"

A cigarette girl appeared with the evening paper. Lucy Mott's companion turned inquiringly towards her.

"Will you excuse me if I glance at the 'Stop Press' news?" he asked.

"Certainly," she said. "I am rather interested in it myself."

He shook the paper open and glanced at the back page. For a moment or two he remained rigid. Looking at him curiously, Lucy found herself unable to decide whether his steady gaze indicated indifference or whether he had really found disturbing news. With calm fingers he folded up the paper.

"Well," she asked, "did you find what you wanted?"

"Rather more than I wanted," he said. "Take my advice—finish that delicious sole otero—they do it so well here—and don't worry about what happened at the Hyacinth Club."

"I may be allowed a certain amount of curiosity, I suppose?"

He sampled the champagne, nodded approval, raised the foaming glass to his lips and set it down empty. "The news," he said, "might spoil your dinner."

"It certainly will not," she assured him. "I am not your partner in crime. The worst thing that could happen to me would be the annoyance of having to hand over that package to the police and explain how I came by it."

"You would not try to shield me, then?"

"I do not know the exact gravity of your crime," Lucy replied. "Has anything happened at the Hyacinth Club besides the robbery?"

"There seems to have been some sort of an accident," he said gloomily.

"For which you were responsible, no doubt."

"It was one of the issues which I was trying to prevent."

"Tell me about it at once," Lucy said.

He pushed the paper towards her, his little finger pointing to the few hastily printed lines under a heading in thick black type.

Colonel Warsley, honorary secretary of the Hyacinth Bridge Club in Booker's Buildings, was found shot to death in his private office this evening.

An exclamation of horror broke from Lucy's lips. She looked searchingly into her companion's face as she pushed back the paper.

"You knew this all the time?"

He shook his head. "No, Miss Mott. I did not."

There was a brief silence. The pleasant half-jesting atmosphere seemed to have been dispelled. Their next course was served. Lucy Mott began to eat with mechanical appetite. She felt her heart beating quickly. It was possible that she was dining with a murderer.

"Don't let this unfortunate incident spoil your dinner, Miss Mott," he said. "I am not sure that it is not the best thing that could have happened."

"How can you say that when the poor man is dead? How can you be so callous?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Did you know Warsley?" he asked.

"We've exchanged greetings on the stairs."

"Well, that should have been enough. You are a person of observation. Were you inclined to like him?"

"That has nothing to do with it," Lucy said.

"On the contrary, it has a great deal to do with it," he insisted. "Everyone who knew Warsley—except his wife—knew that he was wrong 'un. Unofficially you represent the law. You know that wrong 'uns ought to be punished."

"Let's talk about something else," she said.

"It is rather grim, isn't it?" he admitted. "I'll tell you what—let's dance."

Lucy shook her head. "I couldn't—with you," she said bluntly. "You act like a man who takes nothing in life seriously."

"I can assure you I do," he said. "I find this change of your attitude towards me very serious

indeed. You probably think that I made away with Warsley."

"Well, it would not be such a ridiculous suspicion, would it?" she said, turning upon him with flashing eyes. "You appear to treat the matter lightly enough. But I should think that when my evidence is given to the police you might find yourself in quite a serious position."

"So you are going to give evidence against me?" he said.

"I shall tell the truth," Lucy said.

"Very well," he agreed. "I will take what's coming to me. At the present moment, though, what is coming to us both is that wonderful dish of asparagus and after that strawberries! Do you think I could dwell on such trifles if I had just qualified for the gallows?"

Despite herself Lucy smiled.

"I don't know what to think about you," she said. "You puzzle me completely."

"Embrace my motto then for the rest of the meal," he said. "'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' Too often quoted, perhaps, but the soundest piece of philosophy in the world—especially as I believe that the strawberries are really ripe."

To a certain extent there ensued a faint revival of their former light-heartedness. They even danced twice, and for those few minutes, during which Lucy Mott discovered that her companion was the best dance partner she had ever had, she forgot everything.

It was nearly half-past twelve when, with the gradual emptying of the room, the little party came to an end.

"You will allow me to drive you back to your apartment?" he said, as she came out from the cloakroom. "It would give me a great deal of pleasure."

She shook her head. "I shall take a taxi, thanks. Whatever may happen, I have had a wonderful evening and I thank you very much for it."

"I'm afraid that there is one question which I must ask you," he said, looking down at her. "What do you propose doing with my property?"

Lucy looked around. There was no one in their immediate vicinity. "I am going to take it to Scotland Yard tomorrow morning," she said, "and tell them how I came by it. I am very sorry, but I have no alternative."

"You're going to tell them the whole story?"

"Everything."

The enigma of his faint smile, which she was to understand later on, temporarily defeated her. It seemed half quizzical, half plaintive.

"Anyway, I get the night in peace," he murmured.

"If your conscience will per-

mit it," she said, as he escorted her across the pavement.

Lucy Mott found herself in a curiously hysterical mood during that drive home. She was inclined to laugh and to cry and at the bottom of her heart she regretted her solitude. When she had mounted to her rooms and taken off her evening wrap she dragged out the brief case from under the bed where she had left it, placed it upon a chair and opened it.

Then for a moment all the disturbances of the evening seemed as nothing. She felt the color receding from her cheeks, felt an actual pain at the back of her eyes from their dilated stare. The case was empty!

Superintendent Wragge was an official highly thought of at New Scotland Yard. He was careful, shrewd, and he had the reputation of seldom, if ever, making a mistake. A trifle overcautious, he was esteemed by the younger school. He listened to his niece's story on the following afternoon with the deepest interest. When she had finished he asked her a few questions.

"This young man who broke into your office and with whom you dined afterwards—did he never tell you his name?"

"Joseph," she said. "That was as much as I could get out of him."

Superintendent Wragge's lips were pursed. He whistled softly. "Violet Joe!"

"Is there actually someone with that nickname?" Lucy asked. "My burglar used a perfume of violets, I'm sure. He wore violets last night in his buttonhole and," she added with a faint blush, "he had the impertinence to send me an enormous bunch this morning from a florist's in Bond Street."

Her uncle chuckled. "You seem to have made quite an impression upon him," he said.

"It makes me furious even now," she said, "when I remember how he talked and behaved. Tell me, is there some well-known criminal or anyone on the Yard's books who has the nickname of Violet Joe?"

Superintendent Wragge became more thoughtful. "There is a gang about which we know scarcely anything doing very serious work in London at the present moment," he said. "They are supposed to be directed by one or two men of very important social position. The nickname of one of them is Violet Joe."

Lucy Mott asked her next question with a certain amount of hesitation. "Is there anything definite—anything very serious against him?"

Her uncle shook his head. "Nothing at present. All the same we should like to establish his identity. By the way, do you

know where I was all the morning when you called and found me out?"

"They wouldn't tell me," she said.

"I was at the inquest on Colonel Warsley, the late secretary of the Hyacinth Club."

Lucy's face was alight with interest. "Tell me about it. What was the verdict?"

"Suicide when temporarily insane," Wragge said. "The usual thing."

She drew a long breath of relief. "Well, I'm glad about that at any rate," she said. "Was there anything in the evidence about valuable property being missed from the locker room of the club?"

Superintendent Wragge stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Not exactly. Yet in a way you have solved the mystery. I think I can explain now the whole episode of last night.

Lucy leaned forward eagerly. "For heaven's sake, go on."

"It seems that this Colonel Warsley and his wife were accustomed to play competitive bridge matches with any two players who fancied themselves, and there is no doubt but that they were extraordinarily successful. Warsley himself, it appears, was always looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion, but he was tolerated on account of his wife, who is exceedingly well connected, very popular, and apparently a delightful personality.

"Notwithstanding this, however, there were rumors in the club that on the occasion of these matches Colonel Warsley and Lady Emily Warsley, his wife, played with marked cards. There was a secret committee meeting, and it was arranged yesterday that at six o'clock, when everyone was busy in the card rooms, the secretary's safe and all the private lockers were to be opened and searched. This scheme was duly carried out."

"Did they find anything?" Lucy asked breathlessly.

"Not a thing," the superintendent replied. "Colonel Warsley's locker, which was known to have contained several unopened packs of cards the day before, was empty."

There was a brief silence. The superintendent was looking at his niece. With a little flush upon her cheeks she was working out the significance of her uncle's narration.

"I see," she murmured. "My burglar knew somehow or other what was going to happen, raided the lockers first, found the marked cards and escaped with them. Naturally he did not wish to be seen leaving the club. He confessed to me that he had entered secretly.

"I suppose he had arranged matters too so that when I left my club last night without any

parcel or bag my rooms would be searched and they would be taken away. Otherwise, he knew that I would keep my word and bring them to Scotland Yard this morning. Tell me, was the scandal mentioned at all at the inquest?"

"Only in a very vague and sympathetic manner," Superintendent Wragge said. "When the question of motive was raised one member of the jury asked if it was true that there had been any scandal in the club which might have affected the secretary. The attorney who was watching the case on behalf of Lady Emily Warsley got up at once and admitted that, as was common in many card clubs where the stakes ran high, there had been certain rumors concerning the existence of marked cards.

"He thought it should be publicly known that the club premises had been thoroughly searched, including the private rooms of Colonel Warsley, and that nothing in the least incriminating had been found. He branded the accusation as a libel and the chairman of the committee of the club who was present got up and said that he was convinced that the rumors which had been referred to were entirely false.

"The coroner, in his few words, declared that no suspicion of any sort attached itself to the dead man, who was known to have been in poor health and a very unhappy disposition."

"I think," Lucy Mott said, with a severity which she was very far from feeling, "that he might have trusted me."

Her uncle shook his head. "If your burglar friend, my dear Lucy, was really acting for Lady Emily Warsley, as seems likely, he would remember that he had the living to think of as well as the dead.

"You know, it is perfectly possible at such a game as bridge for marked cards to be used and for only one person to know about them. On the other hand, if the truth came out it would be very hard indeed not to implicate both partners. I think your friend's discretion under the circumstances was perfectly justified."

Lucy Mott sighed a little petulantly. "I cannot help feeling that I was rather made use of."

Her uncle smiled. "You must remember, my dear," he pointed out, "that your friend took risks. If ever the time should come when you are able definitely to identify Violet Joe it might be a serious matter for him."

Lucy Mott took her leave with a faint and rather vague smile upon her lips. Somehow or other she fancied that that time would never come.

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

This month's new mystery volumes explore dark quicksands over an unusually wide area. It is never easy, we fear, to trap a killer.

THE NET THAT COVERS THE WORLD by E. H. Cookridge (Holt, $3.95), should be required reading if the Otto John case—both the first and the later chapters—interested you, and if you have sometimes wondered what prompted the Macleans, the Rosenbergs or Pontecorvo to take the road they did. Cookridge lifts much of the secrecy surrounding the careers of these men and women, some dupes and still others conscious traitors, all working for Communist Russia's conception of her destiny.

You've asked yourselves why men like Petrov, as he was known in Australia, defected. Somehow the picture of minor officials "taught to obey and not to act on their own initiative," knowing Moscow is constantly looking over their shoulders, conflicts with the stereotype of the Soviet spy with which we are all familiar. But the actual spy is very often a collector of the masses of data which are fed into the eight floors of the Central Archives in Moscow. These today include data on millions of

Not many critics could edit a famous mystery book club for seven years and remain as vigilant as a newcomer to the field to all the nuances of crime detection. A seasoned crime reporter is so apt to become a trifle blase. But Hans Stefan Santesson is so much the opposite of blase that his long experience as an editor has sharpened his wits, and increased his perceptiveness immeasurably.

foreigners, few of them even friendly to the Soviets, "who would be astonished to learn that the Soviet Secret Service knows even their names"—files which helped to start the Rosenbergs on that long final walk.

According to Soviet officials who have fled to the West, more than 250 officials—mostly women—"are employed on nothing else but keeping the Index up to date." Many fluent in several languages, they "deal with material from foreign reference books or items culled from foreign newspapers," much of this sifted from the incoming general reports on "everything written, spoken, broadcast, and published anywhere in the world, considered of value or interest for espionage work." That odd item may be useful—ten or fifteen years later. Australia and Russia broke off diplomatic relations soon after Petrov's defection. Huge fires were burning for twenty-four hours at the Soviet Embassy in Canberra.

How are the Petrovs recruited? The recruitment and training is as systematic and methodical as for any other branch of the civil service—perhaps only more demanding. Your recruit, today, knows no other loyalty than the Kremlin and no other world than Stalin's and post-Stalin Russia. Products of the Soviet educational and bureaucratic system, civil servants doing their duty—even when this includes assassination — without thought of questioning the wisdom of their superiors, it is not surprising that few of them desert. Cookridge describes the thirty training colleges for secret agents where they are taught that "it is better to take a thousand precautions unnecessarily than to arouse suspicion once," and he describes still other branches of the Service.

Servants of essentially a national ambition, this Soviet Secret Service—thirty years ago and also tonight as you read this —obviously has to be "considered in the perspective of international politics and the events inside the Soviet Union." There is very little glamor in this book, and perhaps not even suspense in the usual sense. But this documented report on the growth and methodology of this formidable force, unique to history, is a must. Read it!

Something has happened to Homer Evans! It started in Hollywood with "The Black Gardenia." It became more obvious in Boston, with "Waylaid in Boston." It has become painfully obvious in Las Vegas. The humble and the dedicated Homer Evans, that rare combination of the very French and the equally very American and still *so* much a flesh-and-blood character, has gone "Hollywood" on us. Elliot

Paul's THE BLACK AND THE RED (Random House, $2.75), the latest report on Homer Evans' contributions to the legend, is more and more zany—in a calculated sort of way—than the earlier Evans adventures. Homer Evans, who obviously has been close to Harry Stephen Keeler in his youth, is still a welcome member of the brotherhood. But I must admit to moments when I seem to have heard so much of this before.

Despite the dedication to Derrick De Marney, "a hard task-master," I don't really know who Anthony Armstrong is—and I don't think I care! I ask no more than a reasonable assurance that there will be more Armstrong novels, built around the quick-thinking Peter Paynter who disturbs the plans of the unpleasant gang that had been using the little hotel on the Rue de Richelieu as their headquarters, in A ROOM AT THE HOTEL AMBRE (Doubleday, $2.75). Recommended!

JEOPARDY by Manfred Conte (Sloane, $3.50), a translation from the German, is the story of a great artist who strayed. A novel about a stateless and penniless bit of human flotsam cast up after the collapse of the Third Reich, "Jeopardy" is the story of his tireless search—back and forth across Europe—for that security and peace denied his generation. There are some pleasant people here, some pleasant and gay and almost likable people, including the wealthy and cultured Hugh Winthrop who makes a specialty of forgeries, and you may find yourself almost sorry when the search ends as it does.

Had Laura killed the man who'd come to her, only a few hours before, claiming to be the only living relative of the dead millionaire? Had he been little Johnny's father? Precisely what was sweet, clinging Doris' role in so stark and dreadful a tragedy? And Matt Cosden's? And Charlie Stedman's? Could one of the three have killed the man who posed a threat to their control of the Stanley Estate? Or was it young Laura March, the dead millionaire's former secretary? Mignon G. Eberhart's POSTMARK MURDER (Random House, $2.95) has an exciting answer to all of this. Smooth and pleasant.

Perry Mason comes close to defeat in Erle Stanley Gardner's new THE CASE OF THE TERRIFIED TYPIST (Morrow, $2.75). Who was the young lady in the office who had a facile talent for concealing diamonds under her desk with some handy chewing gum? What was wrong with Mason's client, Duane Jefferson?

And who, for that matter, was Daddy Longlegs? Characteristic fast-moving Gardneriana, and an unusual reading experience.

PAT ROOT, author of "Evil Became Them," a portrait of some charming decadent and rather unpleasant people, again explores the world of the evil and the lonely ones in her THE DEVIL OF THE STAIRS (Simon and Schuster, $2.75). Lili Tolnay is more than simply an evil woman. She would have had an interesting future and might have exerted a possibly lethal influence in the days of the Sforzas, and the Borgias and the Medecis. She had gone far since the days when she was "the beautiful, extraordinarily charming and gifted young Viennese" whom the narrator's brother was marrying . . . This is not a mystery in the conventional sense. It can perhaps best be described as a sensitive and able narrative study of the frustrations and the fears driving on men and women with "the deceitful face of hope and despair." Read it!

THE FRIGHTENED ONES are "five stories of the unexpected" by Melba Marlett (Doubleday, $3.50). The author's aim, we are told, is to probe "various aspects of Modern American life." Presumably representative in that respect is the escaped convict who, quite unwittingly, frees four frustrated people from problems largely of their own creation, and the man who finds himself wondering, for a while, if he *had* done the right thing. There is the Countess who purred, the father who refused to face reality, and the case of the misunderstood husband—all accused of being "aspects of modern American life." Hm!

A number of people were disturbed when Charles Manion failed to answer his curtain call —including both the murderer and the suddenly very dead Mr. Manion. The casual quoting of *Macbeth* had been the first warning of the disaster which Mr. Manion's p r a c t i c a l curiosity seemed to provoke. And that hint was to prove ominous.

Chief Inspector Furniss, who doesn't like corpses, is an interesting addition to the ranks of British Chief Inspectors who have become so fascinatingly sagacious in recent years. Alex A t k i n s o n ' s EXIT CHARLIE (Knopf, $2.75), is that comparative rarity, a pleasant and intelligently written novel where you don't have the uncomfortable feeling that the author is normally to be found somewhere in the clouds near *The Spectator* or (horrors!) the *New Statesman*. Here, instead, is the English police and the English themselves as—cartoons to the contrary—we really do like to think

they are, without the strains of *Britannia* in the background. Read it.

Peter Barlow, in prison, and convicted of murdering James Gurney Hansford is determined to escape and track down the real murderer. Victor Canning deserts warmer climes in BURDEN OF PROOF (Sloane, $3.50) as Barlow both hunts and is hunted, the action shifting from the Isle of Wight to high in the desolate mountains of Wales where a lonely and bitter Sava Kostavitch complicates matters.

The publishers tell us that here is "the outrageous debut of a detective who bids fair to take the world of mystery fiction by storm," and there may be moments when you couldn't agree more with the first premise, to wit: the debut *is* outrageous! The majestic, white-haired Mr. Fathom is a huge man, resembling both a corpulent Satyr and an elderly Laughing Cavalier. Mr. Fathom's emotions—a gentleman whom none but a Monty Wooley could possibly make convincing—runs the gamut of every cliche in Christendom as the Master solves the horrifying murder, "lashing away" at his suspects "like an Old Testament prophet." The twins Anthony and Peter Shaffer have undoubtedly made an interesting contribution to the field in their aptly titled WITHERED MURDER (Macmillan, $2.75).

There have rarely been so many strange characters crowded together under the same roof. But you may share this reader's pious hope that the thundering of the Old Testament prophets claim our admiration, till our day, with more cause than the thundering of this crossing of Gideon Fell, the much sinned against Dr. Johnson, and perhaps, as I've suggested, that "man who came to dinner."

The murderer was a rather gentle boy. He hadn't wanted or intended to kill the girl, but he had been compelled to do so when she pushed him during those blinding few seconds which were to become a blur so soon afterwards. He was no deliberate murderer and he didn't want to kill again. But there were times when he realized that he needed to protect himself from the ring of conspirators around him who were plotting —eternally plotting—to hurt him, to torture him . . .

Fan Nichols' THE LONER (Simon and Schuster, $2.75), another Inner Sanctum title, is an excellent study of a lost mind, a gentle youngster who liked the laughter of children and who only realized—when he saw his victim lying dead—that he had done wrong. Recommended!

—Continued from Back Cover

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❶ The Case of The TERRIFIED TYPIST

The Very Latest Perry Mason Hit!

Perry Mason has an ace up his sleeve—a gorgeous red-head! She's the surprise witness he's counting on to save his client from the electric chair. But she DISAPPEARS. Perry can't locate her. But when the trial opens she's *in the courtroom*. SHE'S going to be the star witness FOR the D. A.!

❷ The Case of The NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE

Mason's beautiful client, Sybil Harlan, is on trial for murder. The District Attorney produces one witness after another—right down to a ballistics expert who says that the fatal bullet came from Sybil's gun! And all Perry offers in her defense is—*a wheelbarrow filled with rusty scrap iron!*

❸ The Case of The SUN BATHER'S DIARY

Perry gets a frantic phone call—from a woman who says all her clothes and her auto trailer were stolen while she was sunbathing. She offers Perry $1500 to recover them. The investigation leads Mason into a MURDER case. According to the evidence, the killer is either Perry's client . . . *or Perry himself!*

❹ The Case of The GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client has amnesia. She can't remember a thing that happened on the fateful night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own gun — the MURDER WEAPON!

❺ The Case of The RESTLESS REDHEAD

Perry Mason's client is the victim of a double frame-up . . . or IS she? The first time she called up Steve Merrill, the police came—and accused her of stealing $40,000 in jewels from Merrill's wife. The SECOND time she called him, the police came again. This time they accused her of MURDERING Merrill!

❻ The Case of The RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter which accuses her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of arsenic poisoning!) Perry searches Ed's office and finds an envelope with six sheets of *blank* paper! Then the police accuse Perry of substituting the blanks for the REAL letter!

—Continued on Inside Cover

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